

Involved, Invisible, Ignored:

**The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and
Transgender Parents and Their Children
in Our Nation's K-12 Schools**



A Report from the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

www.glsen.org

In Partnership with COLAGE and the Family Equality Council

Involved, Invisible, Ignored:

**The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
and Transgender Parents and Their Children
in Our Nation's K–12 Schools**

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ISBN 1-934092-02-9

When referencing this document, we recommend the following citation:

Kosciw, J. G. and Diaz, E. M. (2008). *Involved, Invisible, Ignored: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Children in Our Nation's K–12 Schools*.

New York: GLSEN.

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Cover photography: David J. Martin

Inside photography: Page 49 – Jen Gilomen, courtesy of COLAGE, from the documentary *In My Shoes*

All other pages – Gigi Kaeser, courtesy of the Family Diversity Project, from the exhibit: *Love Makes a Family: Portraits of LGBT People and their Families*

Graphic design: Adam Fredericks

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PREFACE

On any given day in elementary school classrooms across the country, students are engaged in conversations and activities about their families. Yet not all discussions of family are equally welcome in schools. In 2007, when a nine-year-old girl at Tucker Elementary School in Milton, MA told her fellow third-graders that her mother is a lesbian, she was verbally abused and physically threatened by her classmates. Sadly, this third grader may not be alone in her experiences of a hostile school climate. Current estimates indicate that there are more than 7 million lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) parents with school-age children in the United States, yet little is known about the experiences of this growing number of LGBT-headed families in schools across the country. Incidents like that faced by the Milton third grader indicate that this is an area in urgent need of attention. In order to fill this crucial gap in our knowledge of LGBT issues in schools, GLSEN undertook this study to examine and highlight the school experiences of LGBT-headed families in partnership with COLAGE and the Family Equality Council.

This report, *Involved, Invisible, Ignored*, reveals a complex picture of experiences for both students and parents. The LGBT parents we surveyed are more likely than other parents to be actively engaged in the life of their child's school—more likely to volunteer, to attend parent-teacher conferences or back-to-school nights and to contact the school about their child's academic performance or school experience. Such findings suggest that LGBT parents are, as a group, potential assets for any school community, engaged and concerned

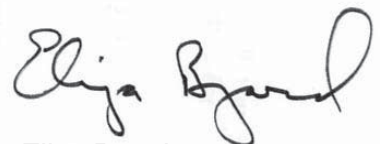
about the quality of their children's education and the school of which they are part. Yet many LGBT parents report feeling neglected, excluded or even mistreated by other members of their school communities, especially other parents. Students with LGBT parents also report school experiences that indicate that action is urgently needed—nearly a fifth of the students in our survey report hearing negative remarks about having LGBT parents from other students, and, even more disturbingly, nearly one-third hear such comments made by school staff.

Results from this study also provide insights into solutions to make schools safer and more welcoming for all members of the school community. Professional development for school staff must include multicultural diversity training, that incorporates accurate information and representations of all family constellations, including LGBT families. Schools must also have comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies that protect all students from harassment and include clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience. Given that the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students has a direct correlation to how safe students feel in schools as well as academic achievement, it is imperative that school staff are trained on effective interventions regarding bullying and harassment. And given that LGBT parents and their children often report that harassment or mistreatment at school comes from the parents of other students, parent-teacher associations must more diligently recognize the diversity of their school communities and ensure that all parents, in addition to students, feel welcome and respected in their school.

LGBT parents must, and often times do, work harder than other parents to ensure safe and effective learning environments for their children. This study reveals that LGBT parents are highly engaged in their children's school experiences, qualities which can be of great benefit to teachers, school administrators and parent-teacher associations in America's schools. When LGBT parents are made to feel invisible in their children's school, schools risk alienating these parents and risk losing the rewards of actively engaged school community members. And when children from LGBT families are subjected to harassment and other mistreatment at school, schools are not providing a safe learning environment and are failing an entire community of students.



Kevin Jennings
Executive Director
GLSEN



Eliza Byard
Deputy Executive Director
GLSEN

Dear Readers,


From classrooms to courthouses to Congress, people who may have no experience with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) families have debated what's best for children with LGBTQ parents in the United States: Will they "turn out" all right? Don't they wish they had "normal" families? Don't the children need a mother and a father? In the face of such constant public debate about us, there has sadly been very little dialogue *with* us about what it's truly like to have one or more LGBTQ parents, much less about the extent to which anti-LGBTQ bias and discrimination in American schools hurt us and our families. Therefore, COLAGE warmly welcomed the opportunity to partner with GLSEN and the Family Equality Council on this landmark research project to document the actual perceptions of middle school and high school students with LGBTQ parents about their school environments.

Involved, Invisible, Ignored provides an unprecedented window into the experiences of COLAGE youth. Students with LGBTQ parents face harassment and bullying each day when they go to school. Although this should never be the case, school staff and administration are often part of the problem.

COLAGE works with thousands of youth like those surveyed for this report. Youth such as Alex, who was left no choice but to transfer to a new middle school in California after facing relentless bullying about his lesbian mothers and gay fathers; and Caroline, a student in Massachusetts who is a leader in her school's Gay Straight Alliance and speaks out about her experience of having LGBT parents in order to create a safer school environment. In all their personal diversity and complexity, these young people are resilient, and have tremendous capacity to heal from such attacks, prevent future harm and be vibrant contributors to their communities. They are also driven by an inspiring vision of strong families, safe schools, and supportive communities. COLAGE is dedicated to bringing their voices and perspectives to bear in every American school.

We hope this report will spark dialogue and lead to more community-based research and action to create safe school environments across the country for all students. We also hope that this report will contribute to greater opportunities for the experiences of youth with LGBTQ parents to be reflected and understood. We encourage you to share these findings with your own community to begin or deepen the conversation.

In solidarity,



Beth Teper
Executive Director
COLAGE



Meredith Fenton
National Program Director
COLAGE

Dear Readers,

When I began as the executive director of Family Equality Council, I knew we had to get serious about collecting, disseminating, and encouraging more research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer-parented families. To that end, the Family Equality Council and others convened the *Real Families, Real Facts* academic symposium in May 2006. More than 120 researchers across disciplines shared 25+ years of scientifically valid research available on LGBTQ-parented families. We learned that LGBTQ parents are as capable in raising children as are non-LBGTQ parents, and the children of LGBTQ parents fare just as well as their peers in all key areas of social development.

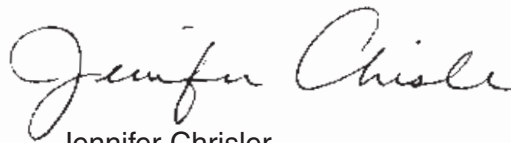
The research gathered at the symposium has already impacted legal fights around the country. Judges, legislators, and others are swayed by the facts we present. By and large, these decision makers want what's best for each and every child. The better educated they are about our community, the better the decisions they can make.

The study before you takes this research-based approach to the next level by examining the experiences of LGBTQ families in our nation's K through 12 schools. LGBTQ-parented families go to great lengths to ensure their children's health and safety, especially in schools. Yet too often these families are harassed, discriminated against, and marginalized in their own communities. This pattern of prejudice and exclusion has real consequences for the quality of education *all* children receive.

Involved, Invisible, Ignored speaks directly to the experiences of LGBTQ-parented families in schools, providing a rich resource. I encourage you to share these findings with principals, teachers, PTA leaders, school board members, legislators and more. The knowledge we gain in research is only as helpful as we make it.

I'm proud of the Family Equality Council's involvement in this groundbreaking study and I thank GLSEN and COLAGE for their collaboration in this very important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Chrisler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jennifer" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Chrisler".

Jennifer Chrisler
Executive Director
Family Equality Council



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are very grateful to the Spencer Foundation whose generous grant helped to make this research possible. The authors wish to thank the parents and students who participated in this project for enlightening us about their experiences with their schools. We also wish to acknowledge the staff and volunteers at COLAGE (Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere) and Family Equality Council (formerly know as Family Pride Coalition) for their assistance in the project, including Jennifer Chrisler, Executive Director of Family Equality Council and Beth Teper, Executive Director of COLAGE. In addition, we would like to thank Jesse Carr and Andrea Wachter of COLAGE and Trina Olson formerly of Family Pride for their help in obtaining participants and to acknowledge the local programs and summer camps serving LGBT families that had their constituents participate in the research and disseminated information about the on-line version of the questionnaire. We appreciate the assistance provided by Aimee Gelnaw and Ruti Kadish, formerly of Family Pride, in developing the survey questions, and to Meredith Fenton of COLAGE for her continued support throughout the project. We are grateful to Sean Fischer and Maria Garcia for their assistance with data collection and Shameka White for her assistance with data entry, and to Emily Greytak, Kate Jerman, and Leigh Howard for their keen proofreading and editing. Much gratitude goes to Kevin Jennings, GLSEN's Founder and Executive Director for his comments on early drafts of this report and to Dr. Eliza Byard, GLSEN's Deputy Executive Director, for her feedback and commentary throughout the project.

About the Authors

Joseph G. Kosciw, GLSEN's Research Director, has a PhD in psychology from New York University and a BA in psychology and MEd in counseling from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a family therapist and has worked as a school counselor and psychoeducational consultant in elementary and secondary schools. Dr. Kosciw has been conducting community-based research for over 15 years, program evaluations for non-profit social service organizations and for local government, including Gay Men's Health Crisis, Safe Horizons, the New York City Mayor's Office for AIDS Policy Coordination and the New York State Department of Health. He has been involved in GLSEN's research efforts since 1999 and has been with GLSEN full time since November 2004. Dr. Kosciw's doctoral dissertation was on the family processes of LGB-headed families and, in particular, examined how families address and understand family diversity, as well as bias and discrimination.

Elizabeth Diaz, GLSEN's Research Associate, has a BA in Sociology and a BA in Chicano/Latino Studies from the University of Minnesota. In addition to her work with GLSEN, Ms. Diaz is currently completing her Master's thesis, which examines the production of knowledge about Latinos/as in the U.S., for a degree in Sociology from George Washington University. Her other research interests include abstinence-only sexuality education and school climate, and the experiences of LGBTQ youth of color in school. She has been with GLSEN since November 2004.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than a decade, GLSEN has been documenting the problem of anti-LGBT bias in our nation's K–12 schools, particularly the school-related experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students. GLSEN's on-going research about the experiences of LGBT students has proved important in its efforts to make schools safe for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Through its research, GLSEN has been able to identify some of the issues LGBT students face in school—such as hearing derogatory language from other students and faculty, being subjected to harassment and assault because of their sexual orientation or gender expression—as well as important resources for improving school climate—such as supportive faculty, Gay-Straight Alliances and comprehensive safe school policies.

Students with LGBT parents may also be subjected to and negatively affected by anti-LGBT bias in schools. For some, being open about their family structure may result in bullying, harassment and other negative repercussions. LGBT parents of children in K–12 schools may face difficulties in their school communities related to their own sexual orientation or gender identity, difficulties which non-LGBT parents may not encounter. However, little is known about the school-related experiences of LGBT parents and their children. Although some prior research has examined whether children with same-sex parents are different from other children on school-related outcomes, there is limited research that explores the family-school relationship, school climate and other school-related experiences for LGBT parents as well as their children. For this reason, GLSEN worked with

two national LGBT family organizations, COLAGE and the Family Equality Council, on this current study. The purpose of this research was to document the school-related experiences of both LGBT parents and students with LGBT parents, including parental decision-making about school enrollment, the family-school relationship, parent-child discussions about school, negative experiences of both parent and child at school, and the presence and potential benefits of LGBT-related supports in school.

The results are intended to inform educators, policymakers and the general public about the school-related experiences of LGBT parents and their children, as part of GLSEN's on-going efforts to ensure that schools are places in which all students are free to learn in a safe environment. Results from this study demonstrate the urgent need for action to create safe and inclusive schools for all students and their families, and provide insight into ways in which this can be accomplished.

METHODS

We obtained national samples of children of LGBT parents currently enrolled in middle school or high school, and of LGBT parents of a child currently enrolled in a K–12 school. Two methods of obtaining participants were implemented: participation of community groups and organizations for LGBT families and Internet surveying. For both methods, data collection was conducted from May to August 2005. Community-based groups and service organizations serving LGBT parents and their children were contacted and paper versions of the surveys were sent to them. Both the parent and student surveys were also made available on the Internet via GLSEN's website. Notices about the on-line survey were posted on LGBT community listservs and electronic bulletin boards, emailed to GLSEN chapters and to national LGBT organizations addressing family issues. A total of 588 surveys from parents with a child in K–12 school were obtained and 154 surveys from students in middle school or high school with an LGBT parent.

KEY FINDINGS

Parental Involvement in School

Results from this study illustrate that LGBT parents are highly involved with their children's education and may be even more likely to be involved than the general population of parents. Compared to a national sample of K–12 parents, LGBT parents were more likely to have volunteered at their child's school (67% vs. 42%) and attended events such as Back-to-School night or parent-teacher conferences (94% vs. 77%). LGBT parents of high school students were more likely than a national sample of parents to be members of the school's parent-teacher organization (41% vs. 26%). In addition,

LGBT parents reported a higher level of contact with school personnel regarding their child's future education, school program and information about how to assist their child with specific skills and homework. For example, 68% of LGBT parents reported contacting their child's school about his or her school program for that year, compared to 38% of parents nationally.

LGBT parents were often proactive in addressing issues related to their family constellation. Almost half (48%) of parents reported that at the start of the school year they had talked with school personnel about their family. About two-thirds (67%) of parents reported that they had spoken with teachers at their child's school about being an LGBT parent and 45% had such discussions with the principal during the school year. In addition to communication with school personnel, a majority (56%) of LGBT parents reported having discussions with their child about what he or she was learning in school related to LGBT people.

Experiences of Students and Parents in the School Community

Biased Language in School

Hearing biased language at school is an important indicator of the nature and quality of a school's environment for students. Sexist remarks (e.g., hearing someone called a "bitch" in a derogatory way) and homophobic remarks were the most frequent types of biased language that students reported hearing at school. Almost three-quarters (72%) of students reported hearing sexist remarks "often" or "frequently" at school. Three-quarters of students heard the expressions "that's so gay" or "you're so gay" frequently in school, and 65% heard blatantly derogatory homophobic remarks, such as "faggot" or "dyke." A smaller number of students (17%) reported hearing negative remarks specifically about their family and having an LGBT parent.

Unfortunately, intervention by school personnel when biased remarks were made in their presence was not common—only 38% of students said that staff frequently intervened when hearing negative remarks about LGBT parents and less than a third (28%) reported frequent staff intervention with homophobic remarks. Even more disturbing, school staff were identified by some students as being perpetrators of derogatory remarks—49% heard sexist remarks and 39% heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff in their schools.

Student Experiences of Harassment, Assault and Other Mistreatment in School

For many students with LGBT parents, school is not a very safe environment. Half (51%) of all students in our study reported feeling

unsafe in school because of a personal characteristic, such as their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, or race/ethnicity. The most commonly reported reasons for feeling unsafe were because of their family constellation, i.e., having LGBT parents (23%) and because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (21%).

Although most students in our study did not report being victimized in school, a not insignificant number reported that they had been verbally harassed in school because of their family (40%). In addition to experiencing harassment based on having LGBT parents, some students from LGBT families also experienced difficulties in terms of their peers' assumptions or perceptions about their own sexual orientation, that is they were presumed to be gay or lesbian simply because they had a parent who was LGBT. Although the vast majority of students in the study identified as heterosexual, 38% reported being verbally harassed in school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Mistreatment did not always come from other students but also from adult members of the school community. Nearly a quarter of students had been mistreated by or received negative comments from the parents of other students specifically because they had an LGBT parent (23% for both).

A small percentage of students reported being directly mistreated by or receiving negative comments from a teacher because of their family (11% and 15%, respectively). However, many students with LGBT parents may experience more subtle forms of exclusion from their school. More than a quarter (30%) of students in our study reported feeling that they could not fully participate in school specifically because they had an LGBT parent, and 36% felt that school personnel did not acknowledge that they were from an LGBT family (e.g., not permitting one parent to sign a school form because he or she was not the student's legal parent or guardian). In addition, about a fifth of students reported that they had been discouraged from talking about their parents or family at school by a teacher, principal or other school staff person (22%) and felt excluded from classroom activities because they had an LGBT parent (20%). For example, some students described incidents in which representations of LGBT families were not included in class activities, such as when constructing a family tree.

Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault

Most students did not tell school authorities when they experienced harassment and assault in school. Less than half (48%) of students who had experienced harassment or assault in school said that they ever reported the incident to a teacher or other school staff. Students were more likely to report incidents to family members—66% of students who experienced school-based victimization told their parent or guardian about the incident, and 43% told another family member. Among LGBT parents, over half (58%) reported that their child had

ever told them about being harassed in school for any reason, and 28% had been told about harassment that was specific to their family constellation. The majority of parents also reported that they intervened with school personnel after having learned about harassment their child experienced.

Parent Experiences of Harassment, Exclusion and Discrimination

Parents were asked whether they had experienced any mistreatment or heard negative comments from various members of the school community: teachers, principals, other school staff, other parents at school and students at school. Overall, parents in the survey reported a relatively low incidence of negative experiences from school personnel. However, LGBT parents were more likely to report that they had been mistreated by other parents at school (26%). In addition, a fifth (21%) reported hearing negative comments about being LGBT from other students at their child's school.

As we found with students, LGBT parents had at times experienced more indirect ways of exclusion from their children's schools. Almost a fifth of parents reported that they felt that school personnel failed to acknowledge their type of family (15%) or felt that they could not fully participate in their child's school community because they were an LGBT parent (16%). Parents described events in which they were excluded from the school community, subjected to hostile behaviors from school staff and other parents, having to deal with general discomfort and ignorance, or having their parenting skills called into questions because they were LGBT.

Results from the survey of parents demonstrated how feeling excluded from the school community might have negative implications for the quality of the family-school relationship. Parents who felt that they could not fully participate in their child's school were much less likely than parents who did not feel excluded in this way to have been involved in a parent-teacher organization (44% vs. 63%), to volunteer at school (47% vs. 72%) and to belong to other community groups (e.g., neighborhood associations) with parents from their child's school (25% vs. 40%).

School-Related Resources and Support

Access to Information about LGBT Families and Other LGBT-Related Topics

GLSEN asserts that curricula and other school-based resources that provide positive representations of LGBT people, history and events are important indicators of school climate and positively affect students' experiences at school. Unfortunately, less than a third of both students (27%) and parents (29%) reported that the school curriculum included representations of LGBT people, history or

events in the past school year. When asked specifically about the inclusion of representations of LGBT families in classroom activities, less than a third (31%) of all students said that representations of LGBT families were included when the topic of families came up during class activities.

Supportive Student Clubs

Student clubs that provide support to LGBT students, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), may also be a resource and source of support for youth from LGBT families. However, only about a third (34%) of the students in our study reported that their school had a GSA or other kind of student club that provided support to LGBT students and their allies.

Supportive Members of the School Community

For students, having a supportive adult at school can benefit their academic experience and may be particularly important for those who receive negative reactions from other members of the school community because of their family. For LGBT parents, as with any parents, positive family-school communication is also beneficial for the child's educational attainment. The vast majority (87%) of students reported that they had at least one teacher or other school staff member who was supportive of LGBT issues, such as students with LGBT parents, and more than half (55%) said they had six or more supportive school staff people. The majority of LGBT parents also reported that there were at least a few supportive teachers or school staff at their child's school (67%).

The presence of supportive school staff was, in fact, related to students' academic achievement. For example, students in our survey who could identify many (six or more) supportive staff at their school reported a GPA half a grade higher than students with no supportive school staff (3.4 versus 2.9). A greater number of supportive educators was also related to fewer missed days of school due to safety concerns.

Training for School Personnel

Another consideration for LGBT parents in assessing their child's school climate would be whether school personnel had had any training on LGBT issues. Parents were asked whether such trainings had occurred at their child's school, and few parents (10%) reported being aware that school personnel had any training on LGBT issues. However, LGBT parents who said their child's school had trainings on LGBT-related issues for school personnel were less likely than other parents to report that their child had been bullied or harassed in school, both in general (14% vs. 31%) and specifically related to their family (7% vs. 20%). In addition, parental reports of educator trainings were associated with a more positive response from school personnel when parents addressed their child's harassment. These parents

were also less likely to report that they themselves had experienced mistreatment in school related to being LGBT.

Safe School Policies

Comprehensive safe school policies that enumerate categories of protections, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, may provide students with greater protection against bullying and harassment in that they offer explicit protections. Although three-quarters of parents (75%) and students (73%) reported that their school had some type of policy for dealing with incidents of harassment and assault, far fewer reported that the school's policy explicitly mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (42% of parents and 35% of students).

Students whose school had a comprehensive safe school policy reported fewer negative experiences in school, particularly with regard to being mistreated by teachers and other students at school because of their family constellation. Parents who reported that their child's school had a comprehensive policy were more likely to report that addressing their child's harassment was an effective intervention (89%), compared to parents who said their child's school had a generic policy (72%) or no policy at all (62%). Parents themselves reported a lower frequency of mistreatment in school when the school had a comprehensive policy, and were less likely to feel unacknowledged as an LGBT family.

State-Level Comprehensive Safe School Legislation

A growing number of states across the country have added explicit protections for LGBT students in their state education anti-discrimination and harassment statutes. As with school-level policies, whereas such laws perhaps have primary importance for protecting students from bullying and harassment, they may also afford protection to the children of LGBT parents with regard to harassment related to their actual or perceived sexual orientation and harassment related to their family constellation. Currently, ten states plus the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in schools and four of these states also include protections on the basis of gender identity. State-level comprehensive safe school legislation was associated with better school climate for LGBT families. Students in these states were less likely than students in states with generic "anti-bullying" laws or no laws at all to hear certain types of biased language in school, such as homophobic remarks (73% versus 92% and 95%, respectively). Parents from states with comprehensive legislation were least likely to report not feeling acknowledged by the school community as an LGBT family and were most likely to report that the school was inclusive of LGBT families (9% versus 15% and 20%, respectively).

Results from this study provide no evidence that generic "anti-bullying" or safe school legislation has any benefits over having no

legislation on these indicators of climate. Although there may be many contributing factors that might result in differences across states by type of safe school legislation, these findings nevertheless lend evidence to the claim that comprehensive safe school laws may be more effective than generic laws or no law at all in creating safer schools for LGBT students and families.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results from this survey highlight the experiences of LGBT parents and their children in K–12 schools, and the need for schools to understand school climate and school safety for both students with LGBT parents and LGBT parents themselves. Educational experts maintain that the family-school relationship is an important factor in academic success for the student. To the extent that certain parents are excluded or not welcome in school activities or are mistreated by school staff and other parents, they may feel that they have less access to school information or educational resources for their children or may not have the same rights to voice problems or concerns than other parents, which in turn, could have negative consequences for student academic performance. It is important for school personnel to understand that harassment of anyone in the school community, whether it be a student or a parent of a student, should not be tolerated. Furthermore, school personnel must consider that their responsibility for maintaining a safe environment for all members of the school community extends beyond students, teachers and staff.

The findings from the survey remind us that school climate is much more than a safety issue; it is also an issue of a student's right to an education. Students in our survey who experienced frequent harassment in school reported skipping classes and missing more days of school than other students. Thus, steps that schools take to improve school climate are also an investment in better educational outcomes. Results from this study also highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for these students, especially supportive faculty, school personnel trainings and comprehensive safe school policies.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create a safer school climate for all students. There are steps that all concerned stakeholders can take to remedy the situation. Results from this study illustrate the ways in which the presence of effective legislation or policy and in-school resources and supports can have positive effects on school climate, students' sense of safety, and, ultimately, on students' academic achievement and educational aspirations. Furthermore, these results show how such school resources also enhance the family-school relationship, which in turn could further benefit student achievement. Therefore, we recommend educators and education leaders and policymakers:

- Advocate for comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation at the state and federal level that specifically enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories alongside others such as race, faith and age;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- Provide training for school staff to improve rates of intervention regarding bullying and harassment and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students;
- Include multicultural diversity training into professional development that includes information about LGBT families;
- Support student clubs, such as GSAs, that address LGBT issues in education; and
- Increase student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events.

Parent-teacher associations must also acknowledge the diversity of their school communities and take steps to ensure that no one experiences mistreatment—students and parents alike. Thus, we advocate that they:

- Endorse policies and practices about appropriate and acceptable conduct for parents at school, and
- Offer educational programs for parents in the school community that include information about LGBT families.

INTRODUCTION



GLSEN strives to make America's schools safe and effective for all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. As seen in the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students, harassment and victimization based on sexual orientation or gender identity/expression is common in our schools and the hostile school climate can hinder access to quality education and diminish educational aspirations.¹ For the children of LGBT parents, being open about their family constellation may result in homophobic harassment and victimization from other students regardless of their own sexual orientation. However, little is known about the relationship between family and school for LGBT parents and their children.

Current estimates suggest there are upwards of 7 million lesbian and gay parents with dependent children in the United States, and it is likely that these numbers have been increasing over recent years.² Despite these increases, legal and moral controversy over whether or not gay men and lesbians should be permitted to rear children persists. Several states have or are considering laws or regulations that prohibit gay men and lesbians from becoming adoptive or foster parents,³ and current fervent controversies about same-sex marriage undoubtedly may affect public perceptions of gay and lesbian families. In addition to potential difficulties faced in school by their children, perceptions of a negative social climate by LGBT parents would undoubtedly influence their relationship with their children's schools. These parents may be concerned about disclosing to school personnel that they are LGBT parents and may be unsure how teacher attitudes may affect their child's education or whether their children will experience homophobic teasing or harassment from their peers.

Little is known about the life experiences of this population of families in general and what research that has been done has largely included only gay or lesbian parents and has not been inclusive of parents who identify as bisexual or transgender. Much of this research has focused on comparing children of heterosexual parents regarding general well-being, gender identity and gender role behavior and sexual orientation with little attention to the social context of family life, such as external forces that might account for any differences, or to family processes, such as family communication or family functioning. The research on the parents themselves has largely compared them to heterosexual parents regarding their parenting abilities. In a recent meta-analysis of 21 studies on families with gay and lesbian parents published between 1981 and 1998, the authors, Stacey and Biblarz, found strong empirical support for the claim that there are no differences between children of heterosexual parents and those of gay or lesbian parents in psychological well-being or cognitive functioning.⁴ Further, they found across studies that the parenting styles or levels of investment in the children among gay and lesbian parents are the same as or higher than those for heterosexual parents. The authors concluded that in the interest of producing evidence directly relevant to the questions of "harm" often

proposed by judicial and legislative deliberations over child custody, foster parenting and adoption, prior research has hampered scholarly progress in the field by minimizing or not examining how children of gay or lesbian parents differ from other children in theoretically interesting or meaningful ways.

Several recent studies have examined whether children with same-sex parents are different from other children on school-related outcomes. One recent study, using a nationally representative sample from the United States census, compared the children of lesbian and gay couples to those from other types of family structures and found that children of the same-sex couples were as likely to make normal progress through school as children from other family structures, particularly when family income was taken into account.⁵ Another study of a nationally representative sample of adolescents found that children of same-sex parents were more connected to school than children with opposite-sex parents.⁶

Although it is useful to demonstrate that children with LGBT parents function in school as well as the children of non-LGBT parents, this research has not explored the school-related experiences of these families, such as the family-school relationship, school climate or the in-school experiences of the students with LGBT parents and only a few empirical studies have begun to examine these issues. Casper, Schultz and Wickens explored the relationship that gay- and lesbian-headed families have with educational institutions.⁷ From qualitative interviews with 17 gay and lesbian parents, the authors found that when children of gay or lesbian parents entered school for the first time, they became cognizant of how their family configuration counters the norm and that the children must contend with the fact that their family constellation is either not represented at school or is represented as deviant. Some research has shown that these families have negative encounters with the school. Gartrell, Hamilton, Banks, Mosbacher, Reed, Sparks and Bishop, in their longitudinal study of lesbian-headed families, found that 18% of these mothers reported that their school-age children had had homophobic interactions with peers or teachers.⁸ Morris, Balsam and Rothblum found in a large sample of lesbian mothers that 16% of their sample reported that they had experienced harassment, threats, or discrimination at their children's school or by other parents.⁹ In previous research on lesbian- and gay-headed families by one of the authors of this current study, 16% of the parents reported having been mistreated or received negative reactions by their child's teacher or daycare provider.¹⁰

The above studies are consistent in reporting that a sizeable percentage of lesbian and gay parents report that they themselves or their children have had difficulties in school because of their family constellation. Only one study has documented reports from the children's perspective about their school experiences. Tasker and Golombok interviewed young adults with lesbian mothers and found

that 36% of the participants reported that they had been teased by peers sometime during their school years because of their mother's sexual orientation and 44% reported that they had been teased during their school years about their own sexual orientation or "inappropriate" gender-role behavior.¹¹

One recent study has examined the ways in which LGBT parents may try to prevent school-related problems. Mercier and Harold, in a recent qualitative study, found that in order to minimize any potential for problems, the parents often selected their child's school because it was known for openness and multiculturalism, had direct communication with teachers and administrators about their type of family constellation and were frequently involved in school activities.¹²

Given that little prior research has examined family-school relationships among this population of families and even less research has explored the perspective of the children of LGBT parents, the purpose of this study was to explore the school-related experiences of families with lesbian and gay parents. In particular, we explore parental decision-making about school enrollment, the family-school relationship, parent-child discussions about school, negative experiences of both parent and child at school and the presence and potential benefits of LGBT-related supports in school.

Notes

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METHODS



Instrument Development

Given the paucity of prior research on the educational experiences of LGBT families, we collaborated with two national organizations that work specifically with LGBT families in developing the parent and student survey instruments: 1) COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), an organization for children of LGBT parents, and 2) Family Equality Council, an organization for LGBT families. GLSEN researchers met with representatives from both organizations, including LGBT parents and adult children of LGBT parents, on several occasions to determine what were the most salient educational issues that needed to be explored with LGBT families and, in some instances, to craft the actual language to be used for certain survey items. We believe that the expertise of GLSEN's Research Department in examining LGBT issues in education along with the knowledge from COLAGE and Family Equality Council of the issues facing LGBT families when interacting with schools resulted in comprehensive and accurate measures.

For the child survey, we used a modified version of GLSEN's National School Climate Survey (NSCS). The NSCS assesses two dimensions of school climate: indicators of a hostile climate and indicators of support for LGBT issues.¹³ Indicators of a hostile climate include the frequency of hearing biased language in school (i.e., homophobic, racist and sexist remarks), and experiences of verbal and physical harassment and physical assault based on sexual orientation, gender, gender expression, race/ethnicity, disability and religion. To this dimension, we added specific questions about negative remarks and harassment students may have encountered because of their parents' sexual orientation. Indicators of support for LGBT issues included the presence of student clubs that address LGBT issues (e.g., a Gay-Straight Alliances or diversity clubs), curricula that are inclusive of the lives of LGBT persons, the presence of supportive teachers or school personnel and the presence of a safe school policy that includes explicit protection based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The parent survey contained measures assessing: basic demographic information, reports of their interactions with school personnel, reports of any negative school experiences reported by their children, concerns about their children's safety in school, community involvement, parenting activities as well as their perceptions of indicators of support for LGBT issues in their child's school. On certain sections of the survey, such as questions about their child's school and specific parent-child activities, parents with more than one school-age child were asked to answer these sections about only one child and were asked to choose the oldest of their school-age children.

Data Collection

This report reflects survey responses from national samples of LGBT parents of children enrolled in K–12 schools as well as a separate sample of secondary school students with LGBT parents. In order to create a more representative sample of parents and students, we implemented two methods of obtaining participants: participation of community groups for LGBT families and Internet surveying. For both methods, data collection was conducted from May to August 2005.

Community Organizations

Participants were obtained through community-based groups or service organizations serving LGBT parents and their children. Our original intent was to randomly sample seventy-five of such groups or organizations from a master list of 137 groups. However, as we began contacting these organizations we learned that many of the groups were not currently active. Further, many of the organizations did not hold regular in-person meetings or activities and were primarily in contact with their members through e-mail listservs or newsletters. Of the original list, 91 groups appeared to be currently active.¹⁴ We were successful in making contact with 35 of the 91 groups. All of the groups agreed to notify their constituents about the study. Most (23 of the 35 groups) agreed to have their members complete paper surveys. Three of these groups had their members complete the survey at a group event and sent the completed surveys to GLSEN's Research Department. Several other groups simply instructed their members to complete the survey and mail it directly to GLSEN. Almost all of the contact persons for these groups reported that many of their constituents were not in the appropriate age range for our study: many of the parents had children who were not yet school-age and most of the children were not 13 years of older and would not eligible to take the student survey.

In addition to contacting community groups, we recruited participants at several summer events for LGBT families, including Family Week in Saugatuck, MI and Family Week in Provincetown, MA. Further, we contacted summer camp programs specifically for children of LGBT families. Of the 11 camps, 6 agreed to have their campers complete the student survey and 2 allowed GLSEN Research staff to visit the camp to collect the data.

Internet Survey

Obtaining LGBT families solely from community-based groups or service organizations could potentially lead to a biased sample—parents involved in these groups or organizations may be more “out” or more comfortable with their sexual orientation or parental status in the LGBT community, and the children in these groups may be more comfortable talking about LGBT family issues. In addition, these groups or organizations may be more likely to attract families who are

in close geographic vicinity, and therefore families who live in areas without such supports would not be represented. For these reasons, we implemented this second method of obtaining participants: both the parent and child surveys were made available on the Internet via GLSEN's website. Notices about our on-line survey were posted on LGBT community listservs and electronic bulletin boards. Notices were also emailed to GLSEN chapters and to national LGBT organizations addressing family issues, such as Family Equality Council, COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and HRC (Human Rights Campaign) FamilyNet. A total of 588 surveys from parents with a child in K–12 school were obtained (508 Internet, 80 paper surveys) and 154 surveys from students in middle school or high school with an LGBT parent (58 Internet, 96 paper).

Respondent Demographics

Parents of K–12 Students. A total of 588 LGBT parents with children in K–12 schools participated in the study. The majority of the parents were women, less than one-fifth were men (17%) and only 2% of the sample identified as transgender. The vast majority identified as lesbian or gay, however 5% identified as bisexual and 2% as other orientations. The average age of these parents was 43 years. Most parents had one or two children (41% and 45%, respectively); fewer than 10% reported having three or more children living at home. Over half the sample reported that only one child was currently attending a K–12 school (58%) and a third reported they had two children in school (33%). Most of the parents reported that their children were in elementary school grades and less than a quarter reported that their children were in middle school (22%) or in high school (20%).

Table 1 shows the racial/ethnic composition of both samples, as well as information about the family racial/ethnic make-up from the parents' survey. Although the vast majority of parents were white or European American, about 40% of the reported family racial compositions were multiracial—about 16% of the families represented had white parent(s) and a child of color, and about 14% of the families represented had two parents, one of whom was white and one of whom was a person of color.

Secondary School Students. A total of 154 youth participated in this study and were between the ages of 13 and 20, with the average age of respondents being 15 years. Most respondents were female, less than a third (30%) were male and 2% were transgender. As also shown in Table 1, almost two-thirds were white and about a tenth were African American or Black (11%) or Hispanic or Latino (7%). The majority of respondents were in high school (58%), nearly three-quarters of which were located in a large city or a suburb of a large city (see Table 2). The students most commonly attended schools in the northeastern and the western regions of the country (40% and 32%, respectively).

Table 1. Racial/Ethnic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Race/Ethnicity of Participants	Students	Parents
White	64%	88%
African American or Black	11%	1%
Hispanic or Latino	7%	4%
Asian or Pacific Islander	2%	1%
Native American	5%	1%
Multiracial	9%	1%
Other race/ethnicity	2%	1%
Family Racial Composition (Parent Sample Only)		
White Couple, White Children		53%
White Couple, Children of Color		16%
Mixed Race Couple, White Children		5%
Mixed Race Couple, Children of Color		9%
Couples of Color, Children of Color		3%
Single White Parent, White Children		8%
Single White Parent, Children of Color		3%
Single Parent of Color, Children of Color		3%

The majority of students in the survey identified as heterosexual or straight, while 10% identified as lesbian or gay and 9% as bisexual. Given that a large portion of the survey respondents learned about the survey via GLSEN’s website and that GLSEN provides information and resources for LGBT-identified students, it is likely that the percentages of students in this study who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual is greater than would be expected in the general population of adolescents with LGBT parents. In fact, this hypothesis is borne out by the differences between the sample of students who completed paper surveys and those who responded online—only 5% of the students who completed paper versions of the survey at summer camps, COLAGE events or LGBT family events identified as lesbian or gay compared to 18% of the students who learned of the survey via the GLSEN website. Thus, this demographic information on sexual orientation from the survey is not necessarily an accurate reflection of the population of adolescents with LGBT parents as a whole.

Table 2. School Characteristics

Grade Levels	Students	Parents
K through 12 school	5%	9%
Elementary school	1%	43%
Lower school (elementary and middle school grades)	7%	15%
Middle school	18%	15%
Upper school (middle and high school grades)	11%	2%
High school	58%	16%
Community Type	Students	Parents
Urban	45%	30%
Suburban	26%	19%
Rural/Small Town	29%	15%
School Type	Students	Parents
Public school	81%	78%
Charter school	19%	4%
Magnet school	22%	11%
Religious-affiliated school	8%	7%
Other private or independent school	11%	16%
Region	Students	Parents
Northeast	40%	35%
South	10%	17%
Midwest	18%	20%
West	32%	28%

Notes

13 Kosciw & Diaz 2006.

14 It was not always possible to be certain that the local group was, in fact, truly active. In most cases, the contact information was only an email address or a phone number with an outgoing voicemail that did not mention the name of the group. Thus, if an email address was not returned as invalid or the phone number was not disconnected or was not a wrong listing, we considered the group to be active.

RESULTS





Parental Decision-Making About School Selection

Although the majority of parents reported that their children attended public schools, the percentage was significantly lower than the national percentage (78% vs. 89%).¹⁵ Furthermore, of those parents who sent their children to non-public school, they were less likely to be religious-affiliated schools (7%) and more likely to be independent schools (16%), which again is different from national percentages.¹⁶

In order to understand parents' decision-making about the schools they select (if they select them) for their children, parents were asked about their reasons for selecting their child's school. Table 3 shows the overall percentages of parents who identified each reason for school selection and the percentages. Overall, parents most commonly reported that they chose the local or neighborhood school (59%) and that they chose the school based on its academic reputation (54%). Over a quarter of parents also reported that they considered the diversity of the school population (31%), that they knew other families at the school (29%), as well as a non-academic reputation of the school, such as arts or music (29%).

Parents were also able to indicate other reasons why they selected their child's school. Of the 138 parents who provided another reason, the largest percentage (16%) was related to the academic approach of the school (e.g., using Montessori method, "a progressive approach," an "alternative learning model" and "an emphasis on global studies"). Another 12% of these parents reported that their school selection was related to special education services provided (e.g., school for the blind, a program for children with Asperger's syndrome, a program for children with "learning differences"). Ten percent of parents said that

they selected the school based on language programs, such as a Spanish or Chinese immersion program or a bilingual school. An additional 10% selected the school because of a previous history with the school (e.g., the parent is an alumnus/alumna, an older sibling of the child attended the same school).

Table 3 also shows reasons for school selection by type of school (public, private-religious, private-other). It is not surprising that there were differences across the types of school. For public school parents, the overwhelming majority reported having chosen the local school whereas the majority of private school parents reported having chose the school based on its academic reputation.

Parents were specifically asked whether their school selection was related to knowing other LGBT families in the school or the school having a reputation for being welcoming of LGBT families. As also shown in Table 3, these reasons were more common for parents of children attending non-religious private schools. Nearly half of these private school parents (46%) reported that the school's reputation for being welcoming of LGBT families was a consideration compared to less than a quarter of parents of children in religious schools and in public schools (15% and 11%, respectively).¹⁷

Table 3. Reasons for School Selection by School Type

	Total	Public	Private– Religious	Private Other
It's our neighborhood school. ^{a,b}	59%	72%	23%	9%
I know there are other students with LGBT parents there. ^b	17%	14%	18%	32%
I know that the school has a diverse population of students and families. ^{b,c}	31%	29%	23%	45%
It had a reputation for valuing and working on diversity. ^{b,c}	22%	16%	23%	53%
It had a good reputation for academics ^{a,b}	54%	49%	67%	73%
It had a good reputation for other programs, such as art, music or athletics. ^{b,c}	29%	24%	21%	53%
It had a reputation for being welcoming of LGBT families. ^{b,c}	17%	11%	15%	46%
I know other families with children there. ^b	29%	27%	36%	40%
I know some of the teachers there.	14%	14%	23%	10%
Other Reasons	24%	19%	31%	44%

^a Public v. Religious; ^b Public v. Private; ^c Religious v. Private

LGBT parents may choose schools that are more tolerant of diverse family forms. Aside from inclusion of LGBT parents, a sizeable percentage of all parents reported that the school having a diverse population of students and families was a consideration in selection—about a quarter of public school parents and private religious school parents (29% and 23%, respectively) and nearly half of private school parents (45%). Even among parents whose child attended their local public school, about a quarter reported that they chose their school, in part, because of reasons related to diversity. This finding suggests that LGBT parents may not only seek out what schools would be most accepting, but they may seek to live in communities that would be more tolerant of families like their own.

Results from the survey further indicate that familiarity with the school and the inclusivity and diversity of the school may be greater concerns for parents of elementary school students. As shown in Table 4, the percentage of elementary school parents who based their school selection on knowing that the school included other LGBT families, that it had a reputation for a diverse population and had a reputation for welcoming LGBT families was significantly higher than parents of children in middle or high school.¹⁸

Parents were also asked whether they had specifically sought out information from the schools pertaining to how they would be with

Table 4. Reasons for School Selection by School Level

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
It's our neighborhood school.	59%	56%	60%	66%
I know there are other students with LGBT parents there. ^a	17%	22%	8%	8%
I know that the school has a diverse population of students and families. ^a	31%	38%	23%	17%
It had a reputation for valuing and working on diversity. ^a	22%	29%	13%	13%
It had a good reputation for academics. ^a	54%	61%	46%	41%
It had a good reputation for other programs, such as art, music or athletics.	28%	30%	25%	28%
It had a reputation for being welcoming of LGBT families. ^a	17%	22%	8%	8%
I know other families with children there. ^a	29%	36%	24%	16%
I know some of the teachers there.	14%	14%	13%	13%
Other Reasons	24%	23%	28%	22%

^a Elementary v. Middle & High Schools

Table 5. Parental Seeking of Information About LGBT Issues by School Type

Did you seek out information about the school your child attends pertaining to how they would be with LGBT issues before enrolling your child? ^a

	Total	Public	Private-Religious	Private-Other
Yes	45%	39%	44%	78%
No	55%	61%	56%	22%

How important was this information in making your decision to enroll your child at that school?

	Total	Public	Private-Religious	Private-Other
Very Important	78%	61%	71%	79%
Somewhat Important	33%	27%	29%	21%
Not at all Important	<1%	<1%	0%	0%

^a Private-Other significantly higher than other two groups.

Table 6. Parental Seeking of Information About LGBT Issues by School Level

Did you seek out information about the school your child attends pertaining to how they would be with LGBT issues before enrolling your child? ^a

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Yes	45%	54%	37%	27%
No	55%	46%	63%	73%

How important was this information in making your decision to enroll your child at that school? ^a

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Very Important	66%	73%	45%	53%
Somewhat Important	34%	27%	55%	47%
Not at all Important	<1%	<1%	0%	0%

^a Elementary group significantly higher than other two groups.

LGBT issues before enrolling their child and, if so, how important this information was in their decision to enroll the child. As shown in [Table 5](#), about half (45%) of parents overall reported that they had sought out this information. Of these parents, over three-quarters (78%) reported that the information gained was very important in making a decision to enroll their child. With regard to difference by type of school, private school parents were much more likely to have sought out information about LGBT issues from the school compared to other parents (see also [Table 5](#)).¹⁹ The information learned about the school and LGBT issues was somewhat less important in decision-making for public school parents than non-religious private school parents.²⁰ Elementary school parents were also much more likely to seek out information from the school about LGBT issues (see [Table 6](#)). Also, the average rating on the importance of this information for school enrollment decision-making was marginally higher for elementary school parents than for middle and high school parents.²¹

It is important to note that parents who enroll their children in public school may be less able to make their school selection based on issues of tolerance related to LGBT families or the diversity of the school. Depending on the school district, some parents may actually have no choice as to which public school their child attends. Thus, it is important that one not interpret these results related to decision-making about school selection as an indication of interest or concern in the child's education. Although the difference between public school and non-religious private school parents in seeking information was quite large (39% vs. 78%), the difference in the level of importance that this information had, although statistically significant, was not nearly as vast (61% vs. 79%). Similarly, parents who base their school selection on the family's religion or who wish their child to receive religious instruction in school may also have fewer options available to them.

Family Composition and School Selection

Although many LGBT parents consider issues of school diversity when making a school selection, this may be even more true for LGBT multiracial families and families of color. As shown in [Table 7](#), families with a student of color were more likely to choose a school based on its diverse population than families with a white student regardless of the race/ethnicity of the parent or parents (43% v. 25%).²²

Single-parent and two-parent families did not differ on their reasons for school selection except for choosing the local school. Single parents were less likely to report that they chose their local school compared to partnered parents—44% vs. 61%.²³

School Selection by Locality and Region

We also were interested in whether parents' decision-making about school selection varied by their locale (urban, suburban, small town/rural) or the region of the country in which they live (Northeast, South, Midwest, West). [Figure 1](#) shows that parents from urban areas were less likely to have chosen their local neighborhood school and further illustrates those reasons for school selection that were different across locales.²⁴ With the exception of choosing a school because of knowing one or more of the teachers, parents from urban areas were more likely to have considered all the reasons for selecting their child's school. One of the strongest differences between urban parents and others was selecting the school because it had a diverse school population: 42% of urban parents compared to 25% of suburban parents and 15% of small town/rural parents. It may be that parents in urban areas have a greater variety of schools to consider when enrolling their children. It may also be that in some urban school districts, schools vary widely with regard to school climate, safety and academic reputation and parents in such districts may consider more factors when selecting their child's school.

[Figure 2](#) illustrates differences across regions with regard to reasons for school selection. Parents in the West were least likely and parents in the South most likely to have chosen their neighborhood schools. Parents in the Northeast and West were more likely to have considered most of the reasons for school selection than parents in the South and Midwest.²⁵ As shown in [Figure 2](#), parents in the Northeast and West were more likely to have reported selecting the school because they knew other families there, because of the school reputation for diversity and for accepting LGBT families as well as because of its diverse school population. With regard to selecting a school because of its non-academic reputation, parents from the West were higher than parents from all other regions.

Table 7. Parents Choosing Schools with Diverse School Population: Comparison by Family Race/Ethnicity ^a

	White Student	Student of Color	Total
White Parent(s)	25%	43%	29%
Multiracial Couple	32%	—	32%
Parent(s) of Color	—	40%	40%
Total	25%	42%	30% ^b

^a The differences between families with a student of color and families with a white student were significantly different, $p < .01$, regardless of the race/ethnicity of the parent(s).

^b Note: This percentage is different than the 31% shown in Tables 4 and 5 because the responses of parents who did not identify the race/ethnicity of themselves or their child were excluded.

Figure 1. Parents' Reasons for Choosing School: Comparison by Locality

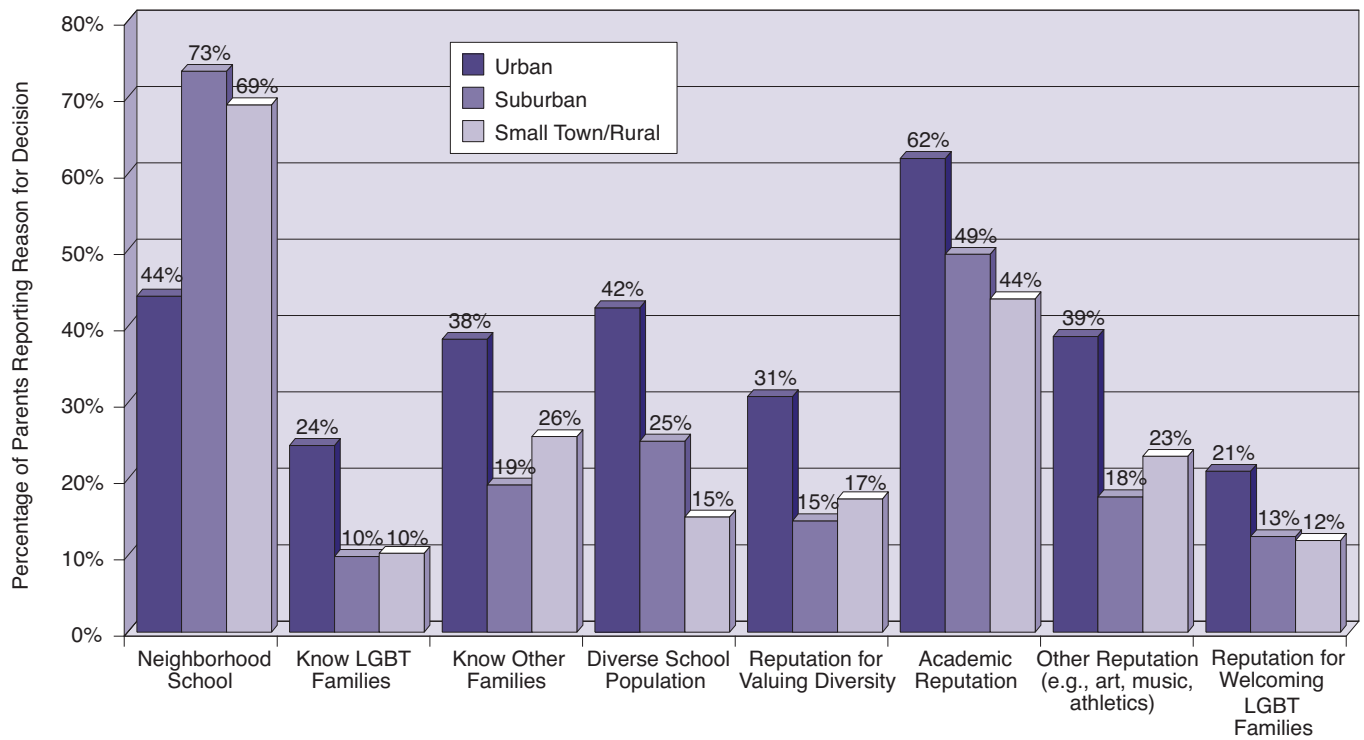
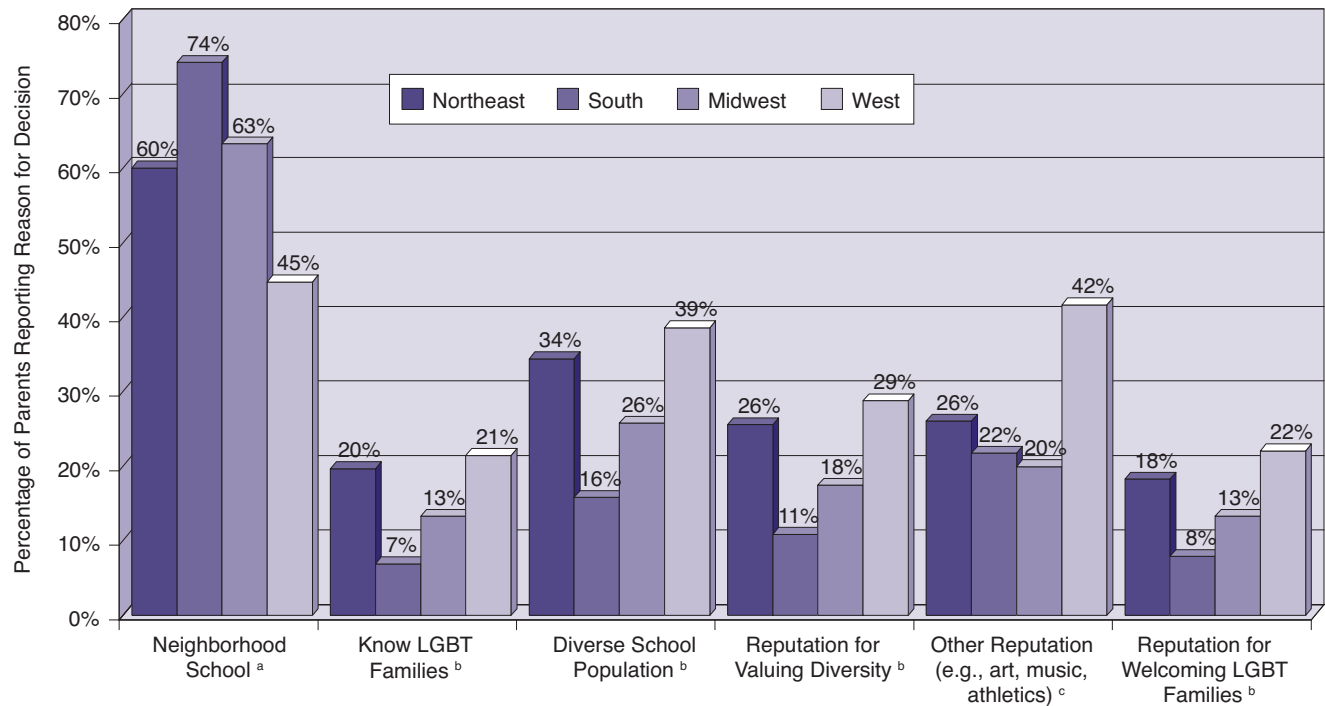


Figure 2. Parents' Reasons for Choosing School: Comparison by Region



^a South > all, West < all; ^b Northeast and West > South; ^c West > all. Differences significant at $p < .01$.

Notes

- 15 Wirt, J., Choy, S., Rooney, P., Provasnik, S., Sen, A., and Tobin, R. (2004). *The Condition of Education 2004* (NCES 2004-077). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 $\chi^2=64.87$, $\phi=.33$, $p<.01$, $df=2$.
- 18 Other LGBT Families at School: $\chi^2=21.29$, $\phi=.19$; Reputation for Diverse School: $\chi^2=23.51$, $\phi=.20$; Reputation for Welcoming LGBT Families: $\chi^2=18.71$, $\phi=.18$. All significant, $p<.01$, $df=2$.
- 19 $\chi^2=47.20$, Cramer's V=.28
- 20 $F(2,564)=10.41$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 21 School level differences in information seeking were examined using Chi-square analysis: $\chi^2=30.47$, Cramer's V=.23. Differences in the level of importance of the information was examined using a one-way analysis of variance: $F(2,563)=4.33$, $p<.05$; post-hoc analyses were considered at $p<.05$.
- 22 Differences across the family racial composition groups were tested with a series of Chi-square analyses. Results for the overall comparison was significant: $\chi^2=17.31$, Cramer's V=.17, $p<.01$, $df=3$.
- 23 To compare differences between these types of family constellations, a series of Chi-square tests were performed. Given the large number of variables, a more restrictive p-value was employed, $p<.01$. The variable "Chose neighborhood school" was significant, $\chi^2=8.20$, $\phi=.12$, $p<.01$, $df=2$.
- 24 To compare differences across localities, a series of Chi-square tests were performed. Given the large number of variables, a more restrictive p-value was employed, $p<.01$. Chose local school: $\chi^2=24.36$, Cramer's V=.20; Know LGBT Families: $\chi^2=11.90$, Cramer's V=.18; Diverse Population: $\chi^2=18.04$, Cramer's V=.18; Commitment to Diversity: $\chi^2=14.48$, Cramer's V=.16; Other Reputation: $\chi^2=21.06$, Cramer's V=.19; Accepting of LGBT Families: $\chi^2=10.42$, Cramer's V=.13. All significant, $p<.01$, $df=3$. Post-hoc differences across localities were tested with subsequent chi-square tests between pairs of localities.
- 25 To compare differences across regions, a series of Chi-square tests were performed. Given the large number of variables, a more restrictive p-value was employed, $p<.01$. Chose local school: $\chi^2=46.6$, $df=2$, $\phi=.28$; Know LGBT Families: $\chi^2=21.6$, $\phi=.19$; Diverse Population: $\chi^2=34.7$, $\phi=.24$; Commitment to Diversity: $\chi^2=19.25$, $\phi=.18$; Academics: $\chi^2=13.9$, $\phi=.15$; Other Reputation: $\chi^2=26.5$, $\phi=.21$; Accepting of LGBT Families: $\chi^2=8.13$, $\phi=.12$; Know Other Families: $\chi^2=20.6$, $\phi=.19$. All significant, $p<.01$, $df=3$. Post-hoc differences across regions were tested with subsequent chi-square tests between pairs of regions.



Parental Involvement in School

Research has shown that positive relationships between the family and the school result in better academic achievement for children.²⁶ For this reason, we examined the level of parental involvement in school activities among LGBT parents and the frequency of parent-school communication about the child's experiences in school.

Parental Activity in School

As shown in [Table 8](#), the majority of parents in the study had been involved in their child's school in the past year. Nearly all parents (94%) reported that they had attended a parent-teacher conference or Back-to-School night and two-thirds (67%) had volunteered at the school. About half (51%) of the parents reported that they belonged to the school's parent-teacher organization (e.g., PTA or PTO) and an even higher percentage reported that they had taken part in activities of this organization in the past year (regardless of belonging to the organization). LGBT parents may also be proactive in addressing issues related to their particular family constellation. About half of the parents (48%) reported that they had gone to the school at the start of the school year to talk to them about their family.

The level of parent-school interaction may vary with the age of the student. In addition to overall percentages, [Table 8](#) shows percentages of parent-school involvement by school level. With the exception of attending parent-teacher conferences, parents of elementary school students were more likely to report involvement in all school activities.²⁷ For example, whereas 58% of elementary school parents reported having attending meetings of the parent-teacher

Table 8. Parental Involvement in School by School Level

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Belong to the school's parent-teacher org. ^a	51%	57%	46%	41%
Attend meetings of the parent-teacher org. ^a	49%	58%	41%	33%
Take part in the activities of the parent-teacher organization. ^a	60%	71%	51%	34%
Act as a volunteer at the school. ^a	67%	80%	52%	46%
Belong to any other organization with several parents from your child's school (e.g., neighborhood or religious organizations). ^a	37%	41%	39%	24%
Attend parent-teacher conference or Back-to-School night.	94%	96%	93%	89%
Make a special trip to school at the start of the school year to talk to school personnel about your family. ^a	48%	58%	41%	27%

^a Elementary School Group higher than other two groups.

Table 9. Parental Involvement in School by School Type

	Total	Public	Private-Religious	Private Other
Belong to the school's parent-teacher org.	51%	50%	39%	63%
Attend meetings of the parent-teacher org. ^b	49%	46%	54%	68%
Take part in the activities of the parent-teacher organization. ^a	60%	56%	56%	79%
Act as a volunteer at the school. ^a	67%	64%	64%	84%
Belong to any other organization with several parents from your child's school (e.g., neighborhood or religious organizations).	37%	36%	44%	43%
Attend parent-teacher conference or Back-to-School night.	94%	94%	95%	92%
Make a special trip to school at the start of the school year to talk to school personnel about your family.	48%	49%	41%	49%

^a Private School group higher than other two groups.

^b Private School group higher than Public School group.

organization, 41% of middle school parents and 33% of high school parents reported this type of involvement.

There were also a few differences in parent-school involvement across the types of schools the children attended.²⁸ Although parents from private schools (non-religious) were no more likely to be a member of the parent-teacher organization, they were more likely to attend meetings and take part in the activities of the organization compared to other parents (see Table 9). These parents were also more likely to act as a volunteer in the school.

In order to examine whether the involvement of LGBT parents in their children's schools was similar to the involvement of parents generally, we compared results from this sample of LGBT parents to available national statistics on parental involvement in school. Figure 3a compares the percentages of LGBT parents and a national sample of K–12 parents available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) on two indicators of parental involvement: attending parent-teacher conferences and acting

as a volunteer in school. On both indicators, LGBT parents were more likely to be involved in their children's school than parents in the national sample.²⁹ With regard to parent-teacher conferences, nearly all of the LGBT parents (94%) reported having participated in the past year compared to 77% of the national sample of parents.³⁰ When considering the school level, the two samples are not different at the elementary school level but the gap between LGBT parents and the national sample of parents widens at middle school and further at high

Figure 3a. Comparisons of Parental Involvement in School Activities: LGBT Parents versus National Sample of Parents

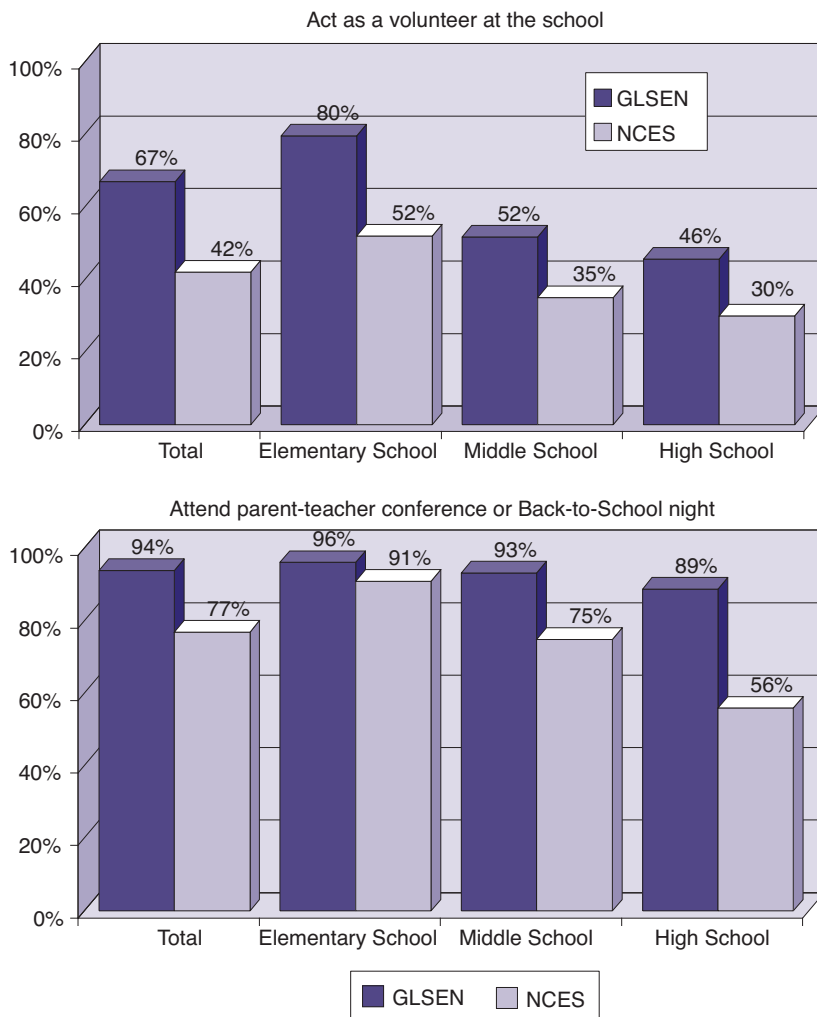
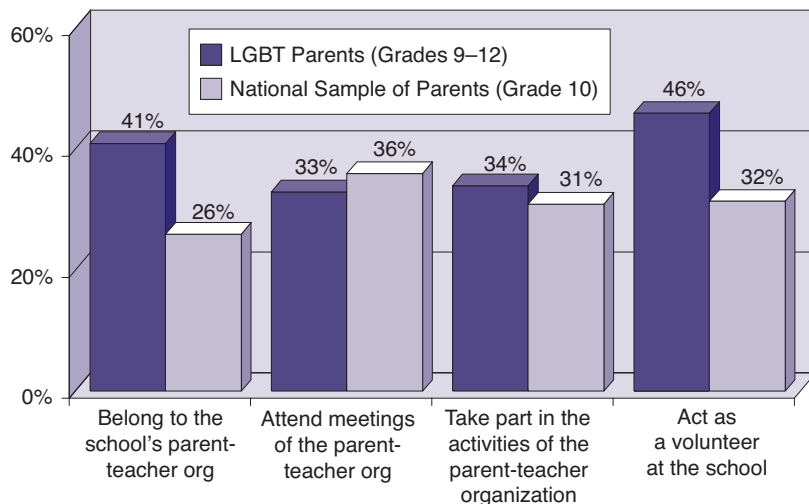


Figure 3b. Comparisons of Parental Involvement in School Activities: LGBT Parents versus National Sample of Parents



school. As also shown in [Figure 3a](#), LGBT parents were more likely to volunteer in their child's school than parents nationally (67% vs. 42%).³¹ Although the differences between the samples of parents were significant across all school levels, the differences were more pronounced among elementary school parents.

[Figure 3b](#) compares those LGBT parents in the survey whose child attended high school with a national sample of parents of 10th graders from the NCES Educational Longitudinal Survey.³² The LGBT parents in our survey were more likely to be a member of the school's parent-teacher organization than parents of 10th graders nationally.^{33,34} However, there were no differences between the groups in their level of activity: attending meetings and taking part in the organization's activities. LGBT parents were also more likely than parents in the national sample to participate in volunteer activity in their child's school.³⁵

Parent-School Communication

Parents were also asked about the frequency with which they communicate with the school—both the school contacting the parents and the parents contacting the school. [Tables 10](#) and [11](#) demonstrate the frequency with which parents have communicated with the school regarding their child's school performance and behavior and the parents' own involvement in school-related activities. Parents reported a higher frequency of communication with their child's school (both hearing from the school and contacting the school themselves) regarding volunteer work, their child's school program for the year and information on how to help their child at home with school work. Parents of elementary school children, in general, reported a higher frequency of communication with the school than other parents, with the exception of children's problem behavior and poor attendance about which they reported a lower frequency of communication (see [Figures 4a](#) and [4b](#)).^{36,37} [Figures 5a](#) and [5b](#) compare LGBT parents of secondary school students with a national sample of parents of 10th graders from the NCES Educational Longitudinal Survey on parent-school communication.³⁸ Overall, LGBT parents reported a higher level of contact with school personnel about their child than parents from the national sample.^{39,40} Specifically, LGBT parents reported a higher frequency of contact with the school (both hearing from school personnel and contacting the school) regarding their child's future education, their child's school program for the year and information on doing schoolwork with their child at home. LGBT parents reported a higher frequency of contact by the school about doing volunteer work and about their children's problem behavior. They also reported a higher frequency of contacting the school regarding their child's positive behavior or poor performance.

Table 10. Parent-School Communication: School Contacting Parents

Since the beginning of this school year, how many times have you (or your partner) been contacted by the school about each of the following?

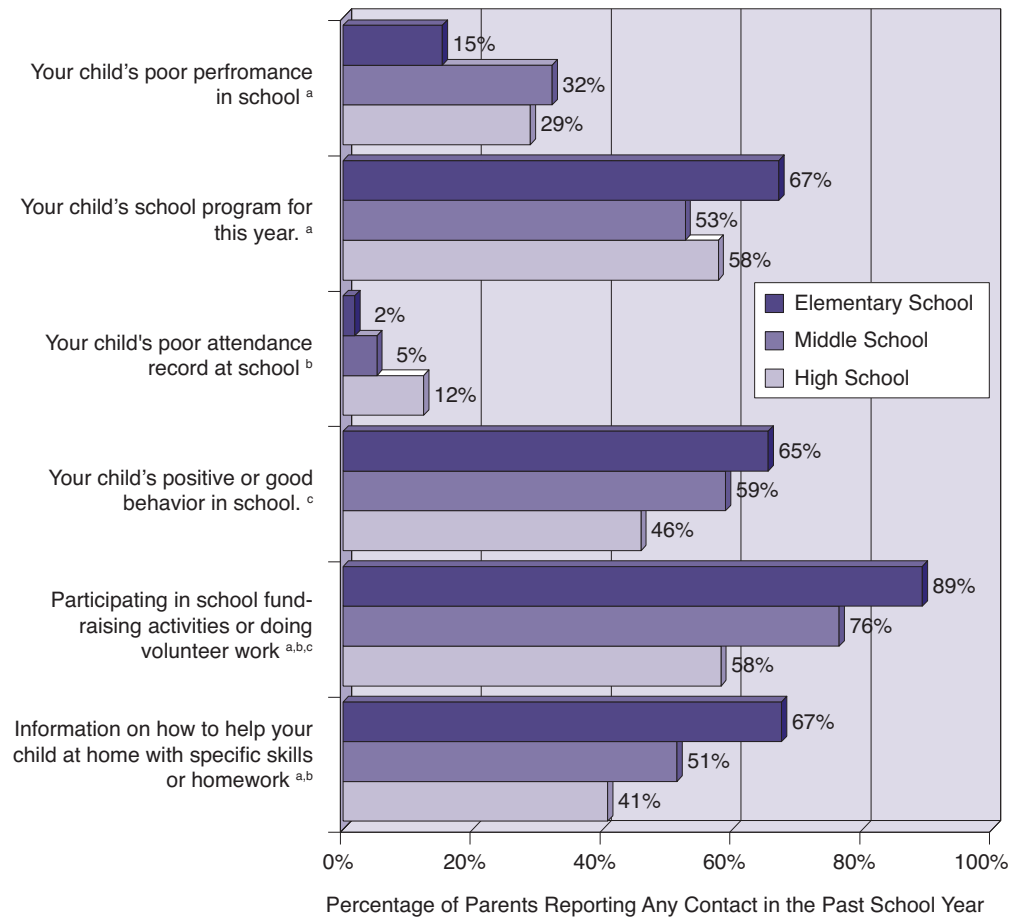
	None	Once or Twice	3 or 4 Times	5 or More Times
Your child's poor performance in school.	79%	14%	4%	3%
Your child's school program for this year.	38%	29%	15%	16%
Your child's poor attendance record at school.	95%	4%	1%	0%
Your child's problem behavior in school.	77%	16%	4%	3%
Your child's positive or good behavior in school.	40%	28%	20%	12%
Participating in school fund-raising activities or doing volunteer work.	19%	22%	25%	34%
Information on how to help your child at home with specific skills or homework.	41%	29%	16%	14%
Obtaining information for school records.	43%	51%	5%	2%
Your child's future education.	49%	36%	11%	4%
Your child was having problems with other students.	82%	14%	3%	1%

Table 11. Parent-School Communication: Parents Contacting School

Since the beginning of this school year, how many times have you (or your partner) contacted the school about each of the following?

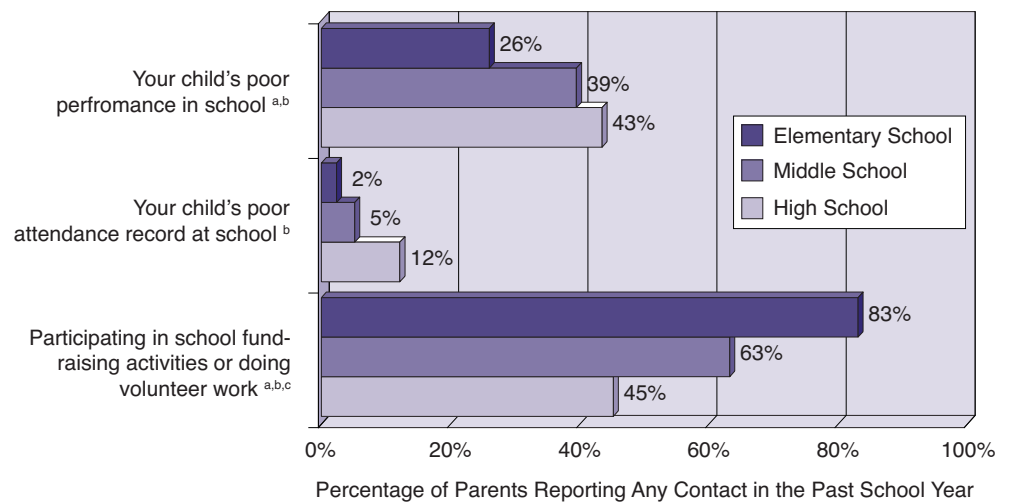
	None	Once or Twice	3 or 4 Times	5 or More Times
Your child's school program for this year.	32%	43%	17%	8%
Your child's poor attendance record at school.	95%	4%	1%	0%
Your child's problem behavior in school.	76%	16%	5%	3%
Your child's positive or good behavior in school.	59%	26%	10%	4%
Participating in school fund-raising activities or doing volunteer work.	28%	33%	20%	18%
Information on how to help your child at home with specific skills or homework.	34%	35%	21%	10%
Obtaining information for school records.	55%	40%	4%	1%
Your child's future education.	40%	42%	13%	5%
Your child was having problems with other students.	82%	14%	3%	1%

**Figure 4a. Parent-School Communication by School Level:
Communication From School**



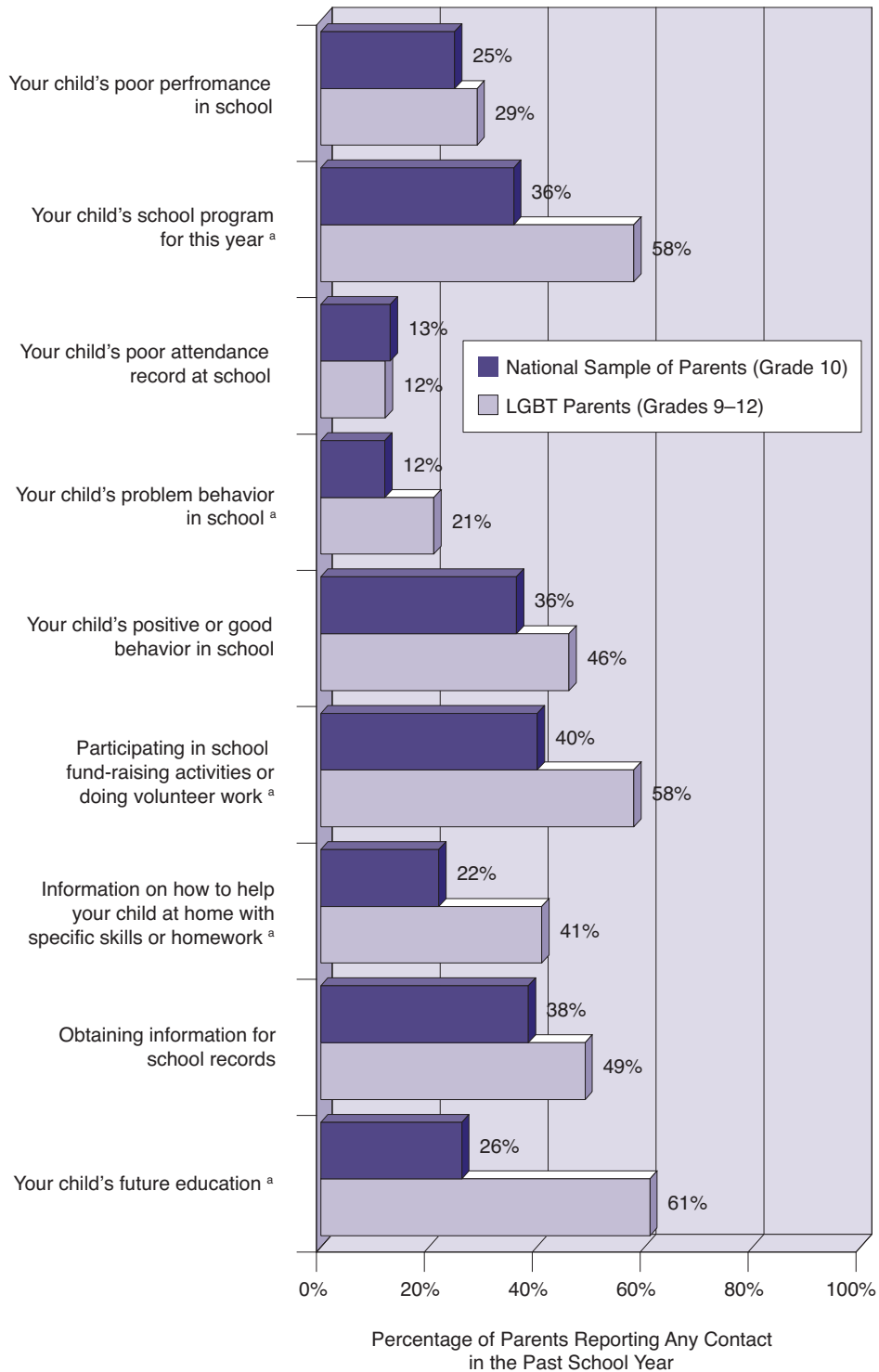
^a Elementary School different from Middle School. ^b Elementary School different from High School.
^c Middle School different from High School

**Figure 4b. Parent-School Communication by School Level:
Communication From Parent**



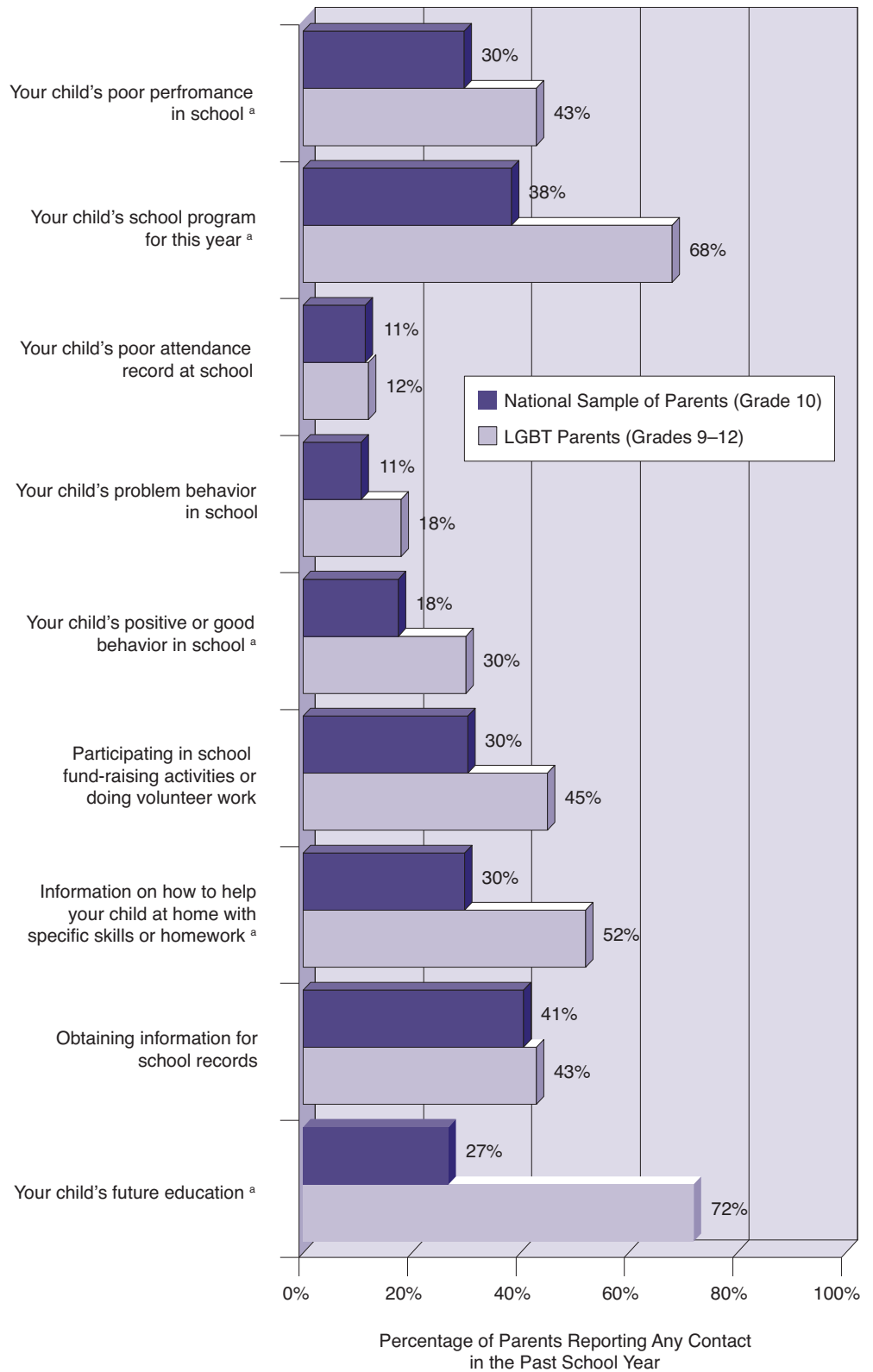
^a Elementary School different from Middle School. ^b Elementary School different from High School.
^c Middle School different from High School

Figure 5a. Parent-School Communication: Comparison Between LGBT Parents and National Sample of Parents
School Contacted Parents



^a Groups significantly different, $p < .01$

Figure 5b. Parent-School Communication: Comparison Between LGBT Parents and National Sample of Parents
Parents Contacted School



Parent-Child Involvement Regarding Education

Parents were asked specifically about their involvement in their children’s education, such as checking their child’s homework, discussing their child’s report card or problems he or she may be having in school. As shown in Table 12, about two-thirds of parents reported that they always checked their child’s homework and discussed problems their child was having with other students in school. Nearly all parents reported that they always discussed their child’s report card, knew the whereabouts of their child when he or she was not at home and enforced curfews on school nights. This level of reported involvement was not significantly different from nationally available data of K–12 parents.⁴¹ Elementary school parents were more likely to check their child’s homework than middle school and high school parents (see Table 13).⁴² With regard to discussing problems with other students—elementary school parents were not significantly different than middle school parents but both these groups reported a higher frequency than high school parents.

The majority of LGBT parents reported that they have discussions with their child about what he or she is learning in school (see Table 14)—with nearly all parents reporting that they have these discussions frequently or often. In contrast, LGBT parents reported a lower frequency of discussing what their child is learning in school related to LGBT people, with only about a quarter of parents reporting these discussions frequently or often (see also Table 14). Elementary school parents were more likely than other parents to discuss what their child is learning in general than other parents. However, elementary school parents were less likely to discuss what their child is learning related to LGBT people than middle and high school parents (see Table 15).⁴³

Table 12. Parental Involvement in Child’s Education

How often do you (or your partner)...	Never	Seldom	Usually	Always
Check that your child has completed all homework?	1%	7%	30%	62%
Discuss your child’s report card with him/her?	1%	2%	7%	90%
Know where your child is when he/she is not at home or in school?	0%	0%	8%	91%
Make and enforce curfews for your child on school nights?	2%	1%	10%	87%
Discuss problems you child is having with other students at school?	6%	6%	18%	70%

Table 13. Parental Involvement in Child's Education by School Level

How often do you (or your partner)...

Percent Reporting "Always"

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Check that your child has completed all homework? ^a	80%	48%	23%
Discuss your child's report card with him/her?	88%	97%	88%
Know where your child is when he/she is not at home or in school? ^b	97%	91%	74%
Make and enforce curfews for your child on school nights?	88%	90%	81%
Discuss problems you child is having with other students at school? ^b	74%	74%	53%

^a Elementary School group higher than other two groups.^b High School group lower than other two groups.**Table 14. Parent-Child Discussions about School**

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Often
In general, how often do you talk with your child about what she or he is learning in school?	0%	<1%	5%	28%	68%
How often do you talk with your child about what she or he is learning in school related to LGBT people?	17%	26%	34%	13%	9%

Table 15. Parent-Child Discussions about School by School Level**Percent Reporting "Frequently" or "Often"**

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
In general, how often do you talk with your child about what she or he is learning in school? ^a	98%	95%	87%
How often do you talk with your child about what she or he is learning in school related to LGBT people? ^b	18%	30%	30%

^a High School group lower than other two groups.^b Elementary School group lower than other two groups.

Parent-School Engagement Regarding LGBT Family Issues

Previous research has shown that when the children of lesbian or gay parents enter school, the family must contend with how their family configuration counters the norm—they may find that families like theirs are invisible or not represented and may even encounter representations that their family configuration is deviant.⁴⁴ Yet, results from our study on parental involvement illustrate that LGBT parents may be as likely or even more likely to be involved in their child's education than parents generally and that LGBT parents may also be proactive in addressing issues related to their particular family constellation. Nevertheless, a number of parents in our survey reported that they did not feel acknowledged or accepted by school personnel. As shown in [Table 16](#), 15% of LGBT parents reported that they felt like school personnel did not acknowledge their type of family at least some of the time with this percentage being even higher for middle and high school parents.⁴⁵ Similarly, 16% of LGBT parents also reported that they felt they could not participate fully in their child's school community. As shown in [Table 17](#), parents of children attending public schools and private religious schools were more likely to feel disenfranchised from the school community than parents from non-religious private schools.⁴⁶

Parents were asked how comfortable they would be talking to school personnel about their family as well as how often they had actually discussed being an LGBT parent with school personnel. Overall, parents in the survey reported high levels of comfort with school personnel—two-thirds or more reported that they would be very comfortable discussing their family with teachers, the principal, school counselor and other staff (see [Figure 6](#)). Although these findings were consistent across school level (elementary, middle and high school), there were differences regarding the type of school the child attended. As shown in [Table 18](#), parents of non-religious private school students reported higher levels of comfort discussing family issues with school personnel than other parents.⁴⁷ With the exception of comfort with the principal, public school parents reported higher levels of comfort with school staff than parents of children in religious private schools.

Although many LGBT parents in the study reported frequent communication with school personnel and were comfortable discussing LGBT issues with them, actual discussions about LGBT issues were most commonly had with teachers and the principal. As shown in [Table 19](#), about two-thirds (67%) of parents reported that they had spoken with teachers at their child's school about being an LGBT parent and nearly half (45%) reported discussions with the principal in the past year. In contrast, less than a third had reported discussions with the school counselor and less than a quarter with other school personnel, such as the school psychologist, nurse or librarian. Parents of elementary school students and of students attending non-religious private schools were typically more likely to

have discussed LGBT family issues with teachers, the principal and the school librarian than other parents (see [Tables 20 and 21](#)).⁴⁸

Feeling excluded from the school community could have serious implications for the quality of the family-school connection—parents may not have the same access to resources and information related to their child’s education compared to parents who feel more a part of the school community. We examined whether parents who reported feeling excluded from their child’s school more frequently, either not being acknowledged as an LGBT family or not being able to participate fully in school activities, reported different levels of participation in school activities and communication with school personnel than other parents.⁴⁹ As shown in [Figure 7a](#), parents who reported a high frequency of feeling that their family was not fully acknowledged by the school had a lower frequency of contact from the school about their child’s education.⁵⁰ Similarly, parents who

Table 16. Parental Beliefs about School Acceptance by School Level

In the past 12 months, how often have you....?

Felt like school personnel don’t acknowledge your type of family? ^a

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Frequently, Often or Sometimes	15%	12%	20%	21%
Frequently	3%	3%	3%	4%
Often	4%	4%	3%	6%
Sometimes	8%	5%	14%	11%
Rarely	7%	6%	10%	6%
Never	78%	82%	70%	73%

Felt that you are not able to fully participate in your child’s school community because you are an LGBT parent? ^b

	Total	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Frequently, Often or Sometimes	16%	14%	24%	17%
Frequently	4%	4%	4%	5%
Often	5%	4%	6%	7%
Sometimes	7%	6%	14%	5%
Rarely	8%	6%	8%	13%
Never	76%	80%	69%	70%

^a Elementary school group significantly lower than other groups.

^b Groups not significantly different.

reported a high frequency of feeling that they were not able to participate fully in their child's school because of being LGBT parents also had a lower frequency of contact from the school (see [Figure 7b](#)).⁵¹ Yet there was no relationship between feelings of exclusion and the frequency with which parents contacted the school about their child's education (see also [Figures 7a and 7b](#)). Parents' beliefs about acceptance and inclusion of school personnel may be informed by a lack of contact from the school. However, it may also be that this lack of contact is an indicator of a less welcoming environment for LGBT families, and LGBT parents from these schools may be denied resources and information about their child's education relative to other parents.

Parents who did not feel fully able to participate in their child's school community were also less likely to participate in certain school activities. As shown in [Figure 8](#), parents who reported more often feeling excluded from the school in this way were much less likely to have been involved in the parent-teacher organization and to volunteer at school.⁵² These parents were also less likely to belong to other community groups with parents from their child's school.

Table 17. Parental Beliefs about School Acceptance by School Type

In the past 12 months, how often have you....?

Felt like school personnel don't acknowledge your type of family? ^a

	Total	Public	Private– Religious	Private Other
Frequently, Often or Sometimes	15%	17%	20%	3%
Frequently	3%	3%	3%	0%
Often	4%	5%	3%	0%
Sometimes	8%	9%	14%	3%
Rarely	7%	8%	10%	5%
Never	78%	75%	70%	92%

Felt that you are not able to fully participate in your child's school community because you are an LGBT parent? ^a

	Total	Public	Private– Religious	Private Other
Frequently, Often or Sometimes	16%	17%	30%	7%
Frequently	4%	4%	8%	0%
Often	5%	6%	11%	1%
Sometimes	7%	7%	11%	6%
Rarely	8%	9%	5%	4%
Never	76%	74%	66%	89%

^a Private school group significantly lower than other two groups

Table 18. Parents' Comfort in Talking with School Personnel by School Type ^a

In general, how comfortable would you be talking to school personnel about your family?

	Percent Reporting Very or Somewhat Comfortable			
	Total	Public	Private-Religious	Private-Other
Your child's teacher ^a	88%	88%	69%	97%
Your child's guidance counselor ^a	89%	89%	77%	97%
Your child's principal ^b	85%	84%	69%	96%
Other school staff (e.g., school nurse) ^a	86%	85%	68%	98%

^a All groups significantly different.

^b Private-Other significantly different from Public and Private-Religious.

Table 19. Parents' Talking with School Personnel about LGBT Issues

For each of the following types of school staff, please indicate how many times you have talked with each one about being an LGBT parent in the previous school year.

	None	Once	2 to 5 Times	More than 5 Times
Teachers	33%	23%	38%	6%
Principal	55%	24%	17%	4%
Guidance Counselor	70%	15%	12%	3%
Psychologist	83%	9%	6%	2%
Nurse	88%	9%	3%	0%
Librarian or Other Resource Staff	83%	10%	7%	2%

Figure 6. Parents' Comfort Talking with School Personnel

In general, how comfortable would you be talking to school personnel about your family?

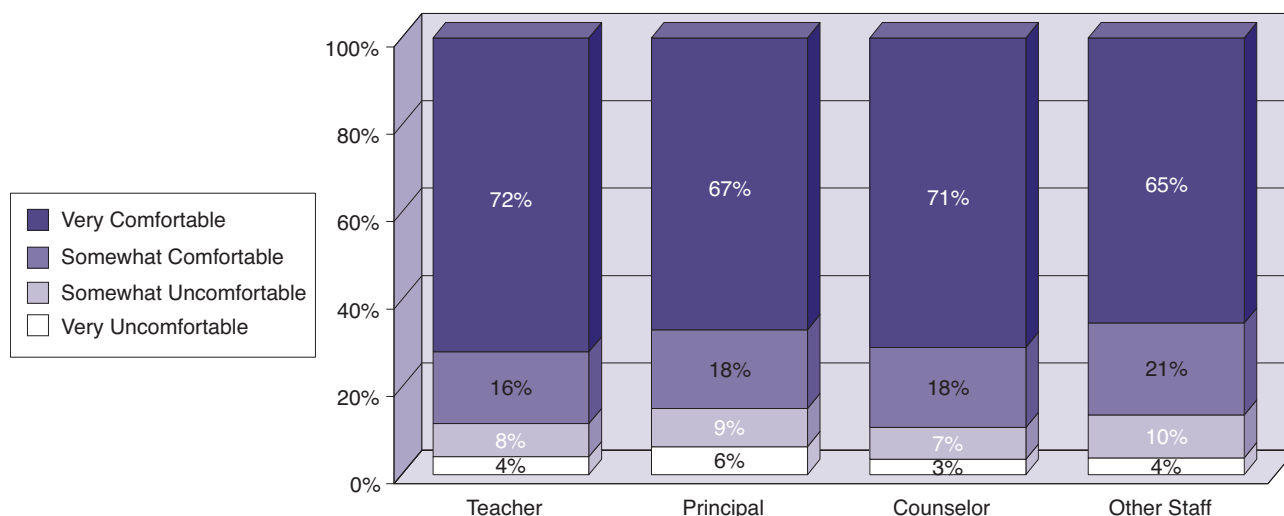


Table 20. Parents' Talking with School Personnel about LGBT Issues by School Level

For each of the following types of school staff, please indicate how many times you have talked with each one about being an LGBT parent in the previous school year.

Percent Reporting One or More Occurrence

	Elementary School	Middle School	High School
Teachers ^a	79%	56%	45%
Principal ^b	50%	46%	28%
Guidance Counselor ^c	24%	39%	35%
Psychologist ^d	15%	20%	17%
Nurse ^d	14%	12%	7%
Librarian or Other Resource Staff ^a	23%	13%	6%

^a Elementary School group higher than other two groups.

^b High School group lower than other two groups.

^c Elementary School group lower than other two groups.

^d Groups not significantly different.

Table 21. Parents' Talking with School Personnel about LGBT Issues by School Type

For each of the following types of school staff, please indicate how many times you have talked with each one about being an LGBT parent in the previous school year.

Percent Reporting One or More Occurrence

	Public	Private-Religious	Private-Other
Teachers ^a	66%	51%	81%
Principal ^a	42%	44%	62%
Guidance Counselor ^b	31%	13%	29%
Psychologist ^b	17%	13%	13%
Nurse ^c	14%	3%	6%
Librarian or Other Resource Staff ^a	15%	13%	32%

^a Private School group higher than other two groups.

^b Groups not significantly different.

^c Public School group higher than other two groups.

Figure 7a. Parents' Feelings of Exclusion and Contact with School: Not Fully Acknowledged by School

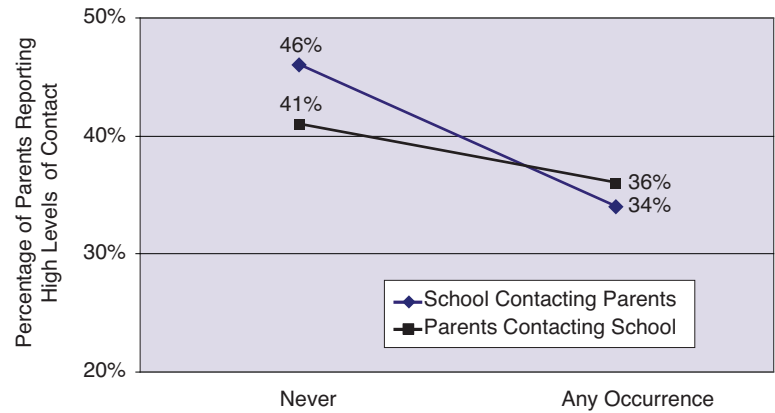


Figure 7b. Parents' Feelings of Exclusion and Contact with School: Not Feeling Able to Participate Fully in School

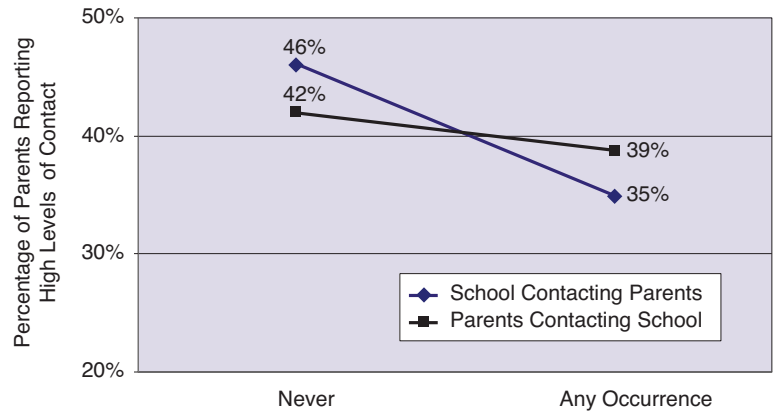
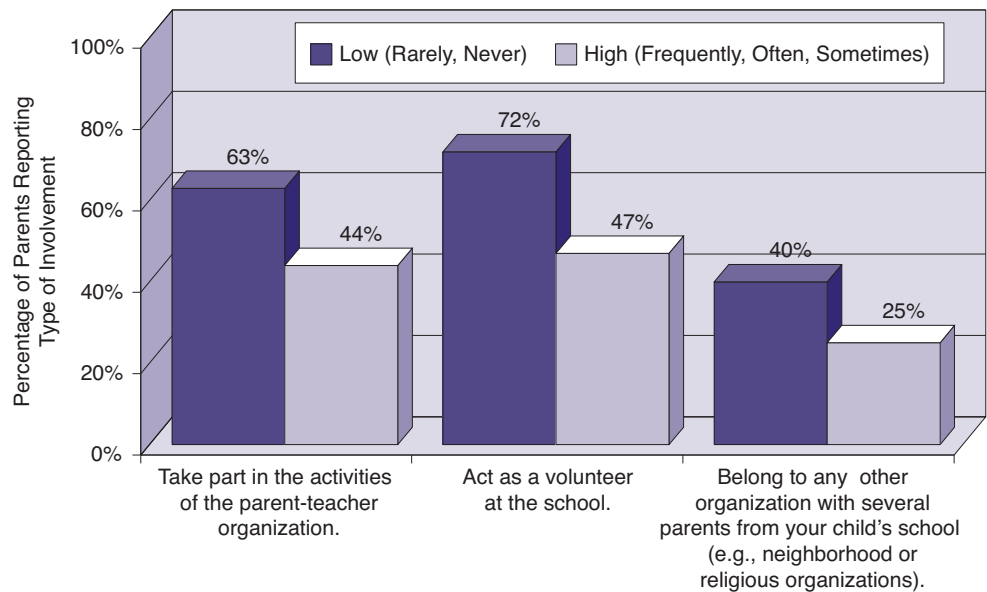


Figure 8. Parents' Feelings of Exclusion and School Involvement: Not Feeling Able to Participate Fully in School



Notes

- 26 For a review of this literature, see: Henderson, A. T. & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- 27 To compare differences across school level, a series of Chi-square tests were performed. Given the large number of variables, a more restrictive p-value was employed, $p < .01$. Attend parent-teacher org.: $\chi^2 = 25.51$, Cramer's $V = .21$; Take part parent-teacher org.: $\chi^2 = 54.77$, Cramer's $V = .31$; Volunteer: $\chi^2 = 60.94$, Cramer's $V = .33$. All significant, $p < .01$, $df = 2$. Post-hoc differences across school types were tested with subsequent chi-square tests between pairs of school level.
- 28 To compare differences across school types, a series of Chi-square tests were performed. Given the large number of variables, a more restrictive p-value was employed, $p < .01$. Attend parent-teacher org.: $\chi^2 = 14.42$, Cramer's $V = .16$; Take part parent-teacher org.: $\chi^2 = 14.66$, Cramer's $V = .16$; Volunteer: $\chi^2 = 13.31$, Cramer's $V = .15$; All significant, $p < .01$, $df = 2$. Post-hoc differences across school types were tested with subsequent chi-square tests between pairs of school types.
- 29 Vaden-Kiernan, N., and McManus, J. (2005). *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2002–03* (NCES 2005–043). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Certain variables used in the LGBT parent survey were also used in the National Center for Education Statistics Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program: attending meetings of the parent-teacher organization, attending parent-teacher conference and acting as a volunteer in the school.
- 30 Using available population parameters from NCES, a one-sample Chi-square test was performed comparing the percentages from the GLSEN sample to the NCES sample: $\chi^2 = 97.03$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$.
- 31 Using available population parameters from NCES, a one-sample Chi-square test was performed comparing the percentages from the GLSEN sample to the NCES sample: $\chi^2 = 153.97$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$.
- 32 Given the relatively small number of parents whose children attended any high school grade, it was not feasible to compare the parents of 10th graders in our survey with the national survey of parents of 10th graders. Although parental involvement may vary across grades within high school, we believe that differences across high school grades would be small relative to parental involvement between high school parents and elementary school and middle school parents. For this reason, we compared the national sample of 10th grade parents to all LGBT parents in the survey with children in high school.
- 33 Education Longitudinal Study: 2002/04 Data Files and Electronic Codebook System. (First follow-up) [ECB/CD-ROM Public Use]. (2005). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Services [Producer and Distributor].
- 34 Using publicly available data from the 2002 baseline data from the NCES Educational Longitudinal Study, we compared the national set of 10th grade parents with the LGBT parents of secondary school students (grades 9 to 12): $\chi^2 = 12.22$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$.
- 35 $\chi^2 = 12.22$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$. $\chi^2 = 10.22$, $p < .001$, $df = 1$.
- 36 Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace = .29, $F(20,888) = 7.5$, $p < .001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$.
- 37 Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace = .25, $F(18,1020) = 8.0$, $p < .001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$.
- 38 Education Longitudinal Study: 2002/04 Data Files and Electronic Codebook System. (First follow-up) [ECB/CD-ROM Public Use]. (2005). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Services [Producer and Distributor].
- 39 Differences between the GLSEN and national samples in the frequency of contact were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace = .01, $F(9,11775) = 13.6$, $p < .001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$.
- 40 Differences between the GLSEN and national samples in the frequency of contact were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace = .02, $F(9,11591) = 23.4$, $p < .001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$.
- 41 Vaden-Kiernan, N., and McManus, J. (2005). *Parent and Family Involvement in Education: 2002–03* (NCES 2005–043). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- 42 Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace = .31, $F(10,1058) = 19.0$, $p < .001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$.
- 43 Differences between groups were tested by a series of analyses of variance (ANOVA) and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. For both variables, the group differences were significantly different: general "talking about learning" – $F(2,578) = 28.7$, $p < .001$; LGBT-related "talking about learning" – $F(2,576) = 6.3$, $p < .01$. Post-hoc t-tests were considered at $p < .01$.
- 44 Casper, V., Schultz, S., & Wickens, E. (1992). Breaking the silences: Lesbian and gay parents and the schools. *Teachers College Record*, 94, 109137.
- 45 Differences between groups with a oneway analysis of variance (ANOVA) and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The group differences for "school personnel don't acknowledge" were significantly different: $F(2,578) = 3.7$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc t-tests were considered at $p < .05$.

- 46 Differences between groups with a series of oneway analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The group differences for “school personnel don’t acknowledge” were significantly different, $F(2,569)=6.7$, $p<.001$, and for “not fully participate,” $F(2,572)=7.0$, $p<.001$. Post-hoc t-tests were considered at $p<.05$.
- 47 Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai’s trace=.05, $F(8,1068)=3.6$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 48 Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. For school level, the multivariate effect was significant, Pillai’s trace=.15, $F(12,1038)=6.5$, $p<.001$. For school type, the multivariate effect was significant, Pillai’s trace=.10, $F(12,1038)=4.7$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 49 Given that we were primarily interested in overall contact to/from school, we computed two overall contact variables taking the mean of the variables regarding the school contacting parents and the mean of the variables regarding parents contacting the school. To examine the relationship between frequency of contact to and from the school and feelings of exclusion (not being fully able to participate and feeling not fully acknowledged), we examined the Pearson correlations among the scale variables.
- 50 Contact From: Pearson $r=-.17$, $p<.001$. Contact To: Pearson $r=-.05$, NS. Percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The two exclusion variables were each dummy coded into any occurrence (“Rarely,” “Sometimes,” “Often,” and “Frequently”) and no occurrence (“Never”). The contact variables were split at the means to create high/low contact. (“contact from school”: $X=1.60$; “contact to school”: $X=1.70$).
- 51 Contact From: Pearson $r=-.13$, $p<.001$. Contact To: Pearson $r=-.02$, NS.
- 52 To examine the relationship between parents’ feelings of exclusion and school involvement, a series of Chi-square tests were performed given the involvement variables were dichotomous. A more conservative significant level was used ($p<.01$) because of the number of tests required. The chi-square analysis was significant for: active in parent-teacher organization – $\chi^2=11.7$, $p<.001$, $df=1$, $\phi=.14$; volunteering at school – $\chi^2=20.9$, $p<.001$, $df=1$, $\phi=.19$; participation in other organizations – $\chi^2=8.2$, $p<.001$, $df=1$, $\phi=.12$.



Students' Safety in School

Parental Concerns about Child Safety in School

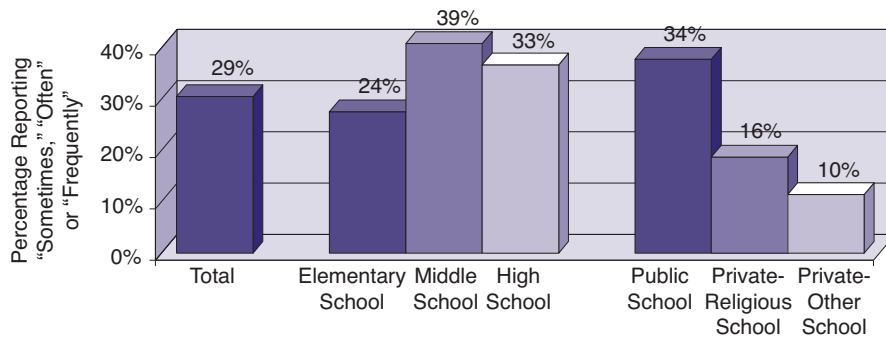
Although many parents, in general, worry about their child's safety in school with regard to bullying and harassment, LGBT parents may have further concerns about their child's safety in school because of societal attitudes toward LGBT people and LGBT parents specifically. For these reasons, we asked parents about their concerns for their child's safety in school, both general concerns as well as concerns that their child will have problems in school or be excluded from peers because of having LGBT parents. As shown in [Table 22](#), more than two-thirds (66%) of parents reported that they had ever worried about their child's general safety in school, with over a quarter (29%) reporting that they worried at least some of the time. A higher percentage of parents worried that their child might have problems in school because of having an LGBT parent—over half of the parents (57%) reported this concern at least some of the time. Nearly half of the parents (48%) also reported that they worried at least sometimes about whether their child would have problems making friends or being excluded from peers because of having an LGBT parent (see also [Table 22](#)). Although elementary school parents, on average, worried less frequently about their child's safety in general, it was the high school parents who were least often concerned about their child experiencing LGBT-related harassment and being excluded from peers because of having LGBT parents than other parents (see [Figure 9](#)).⁵³ Overall, parents of children attending non-religious private schools least often were worried about their child's well-being at school.⁵⁴

Table 22. Parental Concerns about Their Child’s Experiences in School: Safety, Bullying and Peer Relations

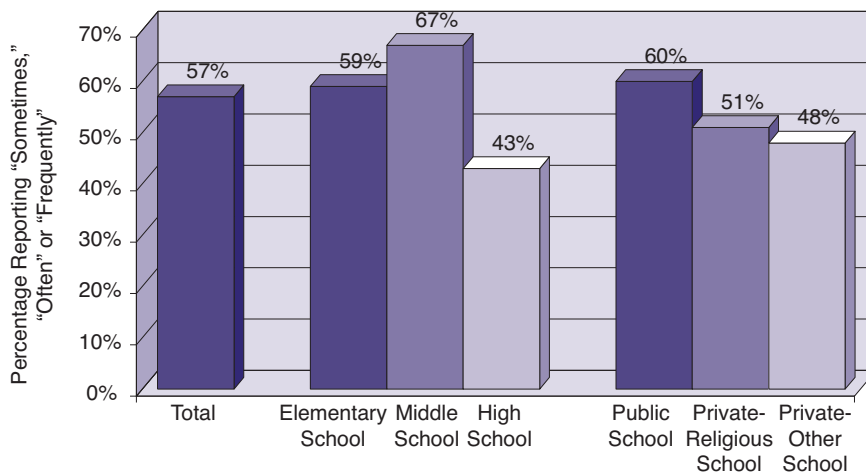
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
How often do you worry that your child is safe in school?	34%	37%	22%	5%	2%
How often do you worry that your child will have problems in school because of having LGBT parents?	13%	30%	41%	12%	4%
How often do you worry that your child will have problems making friends in school or being excluded from classmates because of having LGBT parents?	20%	32%	35%	10%	3%

LGBT parents may have greater concern about their child's welfare in school than parents in general. According to a Gallup Poll conducted around the same time as our parent survey (August 8–11, 2005), only about a fifth (21%) of parents with a child in K–12 school reported that they feared for their child's physical safety at school.⁵⁵ This national percentage is far lower than the two-thirds (66%) of LGBT parents who ever reported worrying about their child's safety in school and lower than the more conservative percentage of parents who reported worrying at least sometimes (29% reported “sometimes,” “often” or “frequently”).⁵⁶ It is important to note that the question from Gallup and that from GLSEN were slightly different—Gallup asked specifically about physical safety whereas we did not. Nevertheless, the finding may demonstrate that LGBT parents are highly concerned about their child's safety in school. It is possible that LGBT parents are simply more concerned parents and this heightened concern has nothing to do with their family form. However, given the high percentage of LGBT parents who are specifically concerned about their child having problems in school because of their family constellation, it is also possible that this heightened sense of concern regarding school safety is because these parents anticipate the child being a likelier target for bullying and harassment because of having LGBT parents.

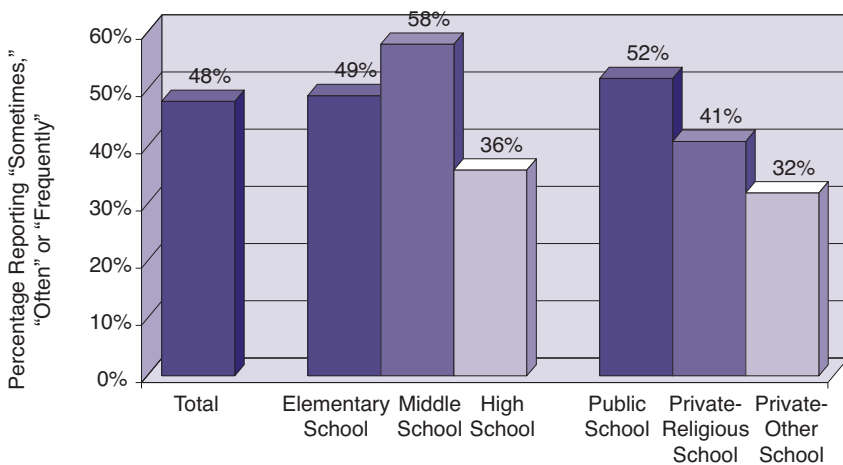
Figure 9. Parental Worries about Child Safety in School



How often do you worry that your child is safe in school? ^a



How often do you worry that your child will have problems in school because of having LGBT parents? ^b



How often do you worry that your child will have problems making friends in school or being excluded from classmates because of having LGBT parents? ^b

^a Elementary group significantly lower than other two groups. Public school group significantly higher than other two groups. ^b High school group significantly lower than other two groups. Private – Other group significantly lower than Public School group.

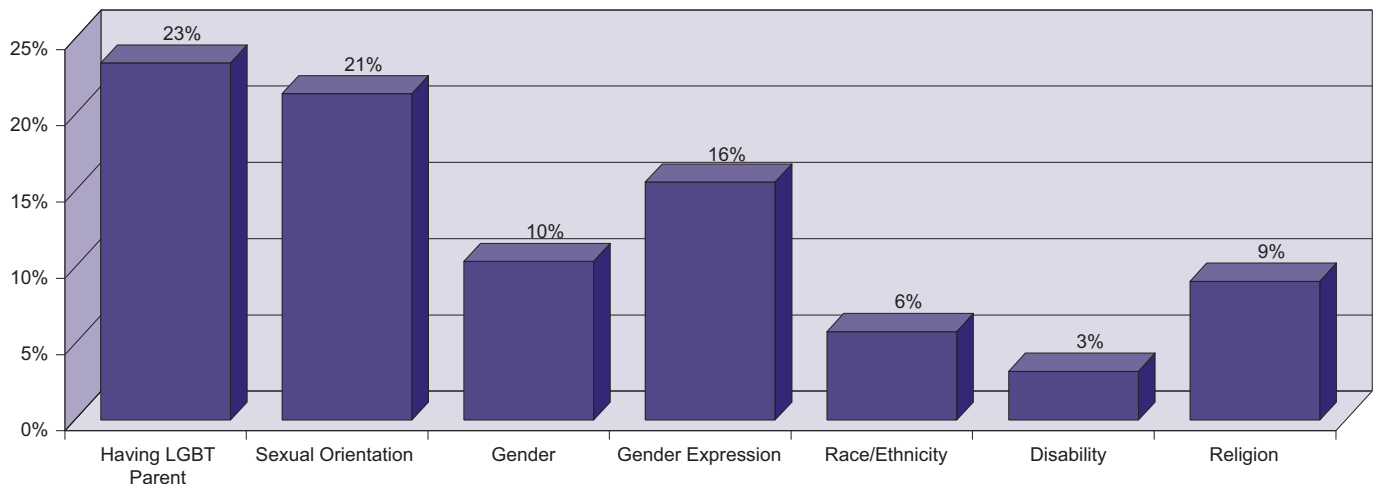
Students' Reports on General Safety in School

In order to better understand the safety concerns of children from LGBT families, we asked students about their own feelings of safety in school, both general feelings of safety and safety based on specific personal characteristics, such as their family constellation, gender expression (i.e., how traditionally “masculine” or “feminine” they were), gender, and actual or perceived sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, disability and religion. Half (51%) of all students said they felt unsafe at school because of any of these characteristics, with family constellation and actual or perceived sexual orientation being the most commonly reported reasons for feeling unsafe. As shown in Figure 10, nearly a quarter (23%) felt unsafe at school because they had an LGBT parent, and a fifth (21%) felt unsafe because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. Almost a fifth (16%) of the students in our study felt unsafe at school because of how they expressed their gender. Some students also reported feeling unsafe at school because of their gender (10%), or their actual or perceived religion (9%), race/ethnicity (6%) or a disability (3%).

Attending a school that does not provide a safe learning environment may lead to greater absenteeism among students who do not feel safe. Nearly a fifth of the students in this study said they had skipped a class at least one time (15%) or missed at least one day of school (17%) in the past month because they felt unsafe at school.

Compared to a national sample of the general student population, students with LGBT parents were much more likely to indicate that they were made to feel unsafe in school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (21% v. 6%), gender (10% v. 2%), how they expressed their gender (16% v. 8%), and their actual or perceived religion (10% v. 5%).⁵⁷ These differences may be indicative of experiences that are unique to youth with LGBT parents, experiences that their peers may not encounter when at school.

Figure 10. Percentage of Students Who Felt Unsafe at School



Notes

- 53 Differences across elementary, middle and high schools were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance with the three worry-related dependent variables. Percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace=.06, $F(6,1150)=6.3$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects and post-hoc group comparisons were considered at $p<.01$.
- 54 Differences across school type were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance with the three worry-related dependent variables. Percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace=.07, $F(6,1152)=6.8$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects and post-hoc group comparisons were considered at $p<.01$.
- 55 Gallup (2007). Gallup's pulse of democracy: Education. Retrieved September 13, 2007, from <http://www.galluppoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=1612>.
- 56 Chi-square goodness of fit test was used to compare the percentages of parents in the LGBT Family study with the percentages of parents from the national population on parental worry about child safety in school. The percentage of LGBT parents who ever worried about their child's safety in school was significantly higher than the percentage of the general population of parents who worried about their child's physical safety in school: $\chi^2=724.4$, $df=1$, $p<.001$. The percentage of LGBT parents who worried more often was also significantly higher than that of the general population: $\chi^2=21.0$, $df=1$, $p<.001$.
- 57 Harris Interactive, Inc. & GLSEN Study: 2005 Data File. New York: GLSEN. Chi-square nonparametric test was used to compare the percentages of students in the LGBT Family study who reported feeling unsafe with the percentages of students from the national population. Sexual orientation: $\chi^2=64.9$, $df=1$, $p<.001$. Gender: $\chi^2=55.3$, $df=1$, $p<.001$. Gender expression: $\chi^2=12.0$, $df=1$, $p<.01$. Religion: $\chi^2=5.4$, $df=1$, $p<.05$.



Students' Negative School Experiences

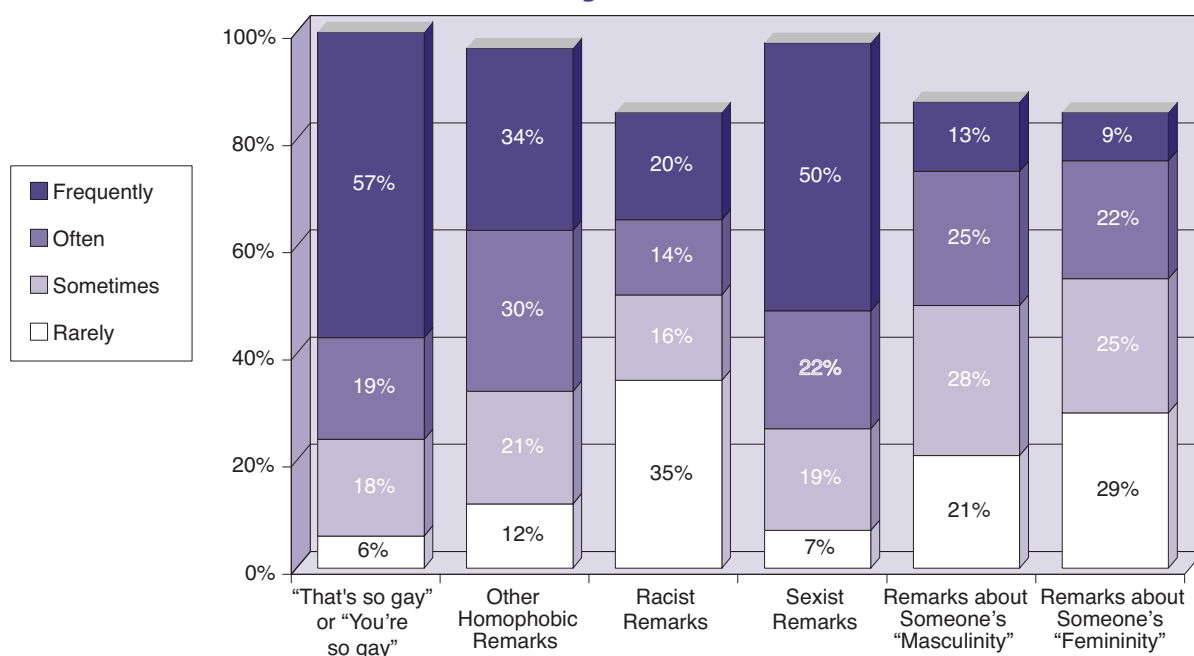
Although there is a growing body of literature documenting safety issues, such as bullying and harassment, in U.S. schools, little is known about the school experiences of youth who have an LGBT parent or guardian. In order to better understand the school experiences of students from LGBT families, we asked students a range of questions about their safety and comfort at school, including their exposure to biased language and their experiences of bullying, harassment and other forms of mistreatment.

Biased Language at School

Hearing biased language at school is an important indicator of the nature and quality of a school's environment for students. Thus, students were asked about the frequency of hearing homophobic, racist and sexist remarks at school, hearing negative remarks about how people expressed their gender, and hearing negative remarks about LGBT parents and families.

Biased Language from Students. Figure 11 shows the frequency of the different types of biased language made by other students in school. Sexist remarks (e.g., hearing someone called a "bitch" in a derogatory way) and homophobic remarks were the most frequent types of biased language that students reported hearing at school. As shown in Figure 11, almost three-quarters (72%) of students reported hearing sexist remarks "often" or "frequently" at school. Although not usually considered as derogatory as terms such as "faggot" the expressions "that's so gay" and "you're so gay" are often used to refer to someone or something as "stupid" or worthless. Three-quarters of

Figure 11. Students' Reports on Frequency of Hearing Biased Remarks at School



students in our survey indicated that they heard these expressions often or frequently in school. With regard to more blatantly derogatory homophobic remarks, almost two-thirds (64%) heard remarks such as “faggot” or “dyke” often or frequently. Many students also reported hearing negative remarks regarding gender expression at school, such as comments about a student not acting “masculine” or “feminine” enough—about a third heard these comments often or frequently. In addition, a sizable percentage of students reported hearing racist remarks (e.g., “nigger” or “spic”) at school—about a third (34%) of students reported hearing such remarks often or frequently.

In addition to the frequency of this language in school, we also asked students about the pervasiveness of biased language use—how many students make these types of remarks in school.⁵⁸ Many students reported hearing sexist and homophobic remarks from “most” of their peers (43% and 32%, respectively). Smaller percentages of students heard negative remarks about gender expression (21%) and racist remarks (17%) from most of the students at their school.

Although homophobic remarks could add to a negative environment for students with LGBT parents in that it relates to their parent or parents, it is possible that members of the school community make negative remarks specifically about having lesbian or gay parents. For this reason, we asked students how often they heard these types of remarks in school. Although these types of remarks were less common than other types of biased remarks, 18% of students had heard negative remarks about having an LGBT parent often or

frequently while at school (see Figure 12). With regard to the prevalence of these comments among the student body, about a tenth of students (11%) reported that they heard these types of comments from most of the students in their school.

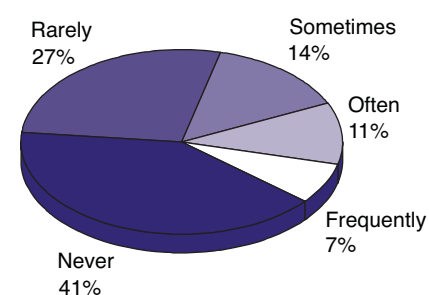
In order to examine whether the school experiences of students with LGBT parents were similar to the experiences of the general population of secondary school students, we compared results from this sample to findings from a recent study that examined the experiences of the general student population with issues related to school climate.⁵⁹ There were some important differences between the general student population and students from LGBT families with regard to their reports about biased language in school. Students from LGBT families were more likely to report that they frequently heard homophobic (64% v. 52%), sexist (72% v. 51%), and racist remarks (34% v. 26%) at school.⁶⁰ These differences may, in part, be due to the differences in sample demographics. For example, there were higher percentages of female students in the sample of students with LGBT parents than in the sample from the general population, and female students may be more likely to be aware of sexist language use in their schools.

Biased Language from School Staff. Any degree of biased or derogatory language from school staff should be considered unacceptable and not tolerated in our schools. Hearing biased language from teachers or other school authority figures may send a message to students that such language use is to be tolerated and possibly acceptable. Unfortunately, many students said they heard teachers or other school personnel use sexist, homophobic, and racist language at school, as shown in Figure 13.

Similar to students' reports regarding biased language from students, sexist remarks were the most frequently heard type of biased language—about half (49%) of students reported hearing school staff make sexist remarks. More than a third (39%) reported that school staff made homophobic remarks at school, and more than a quarter said they heard staff make negative comments about gender expression (30%), LGBT families (28%) and racist remarks (26%) in school.

Intervention by School Staff with Biased Language. While hearing biased remarks was a common occurrence in students' schools, according to students' reports intervention by school staff when such language was used in their presence was not. Only 59% of students reported that a teacher or other school staff frequently ("most of the time" or "always") intervened when hearing racist remarks, and less than half (42%) said staff frequently intervened when sexist remarks were made in their presence (see Figure 14). School staff were much less likely to intervene when hearing negative remarks about LGBT parents, homophobic remarks and negative remarks about gender expression. Only 38% of students reported that staff frequently intervened when hearing remarks about LGBT parents, less than a

Figure 12. "How often have you heard negative remarks about your family having an LGBT parent or parents?"



third (28%) of students said that school staff frequently intervened when hearing homophobic remarks, and less than a quarter (22%) indicated frequent staff intervention when remarks related to gender expression were made. Although students with LGBT families were more likely than the general population of secondary school students to report hearing racist remarks in school, they were also more likely report that school staff frequently intervened when racist remarks were made in their presence (59% v. 37%).⁶¹

Students' Experiences of Harassment and Assault

In addition to their overall feelings of safety at school, students were asked about their experiences of serious types of harassment at school. Although most students did not report experiencing difficulties at school, some experienced verbal harassment (e.g., called names or threatened), physical harassment (e.g., shoved or pushed) and assault (e.g., punched, kicked or injured with a weapon). In fact, for sizable percentages of students, family constellation, actual or perceived sexual orientation, and gender expression resulted in them being targeted for harassment and other mistreatment at school.

Students' Experiences of Verbal Harassment. As noted above, students often heard homophobic remarks and other kinds of biased language in school, and a substantial percentage of students heard negative remarks about having an LGBT parent—remarks that may or may not have been directed specifically at them. In addition to the frequency of hearing negative remarks in their school about LGBT parents, we also asked students about any incidents of verbal harassment they may have experienced, incidents in which behaviors such as name-calling or verbal threats were directed at them personally because they had an LGBT parent. As shown in [Figure 15](#), 42% of students said they had been verbally harassed at school in the past year because their parents were LGBT. In addition to family constellation, students were asked about the frequency of experiencing verbal harassment based on other characteristics. Over a third (37%) of students reported that they had been verbally harassed because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation and nearly a third had experienced verbal harassment because of their gender (30%) or the way in which they expressed their gender (33%). Fewer students reported that they had experienced verbal harassment based on their actual or perceived race/ethnicity (26%), a disability (18%) or religion (21%).

In addition to experiencing harassment based on having LGBT parents, some students from LGBT families may also experience difficulties at school in terms of their peers' assumptions or perceptions about their own sexual orientation. Specifically, some students may experience harassment in school because their peers believe that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual simply because they have an LGBT parent, regardless of their actual sexual orientation. As shown in [Figure 16](#), more than a third of students in our study reported being

Figure 13. Percentage of Students Who Heard Biased Remarks From School Staff

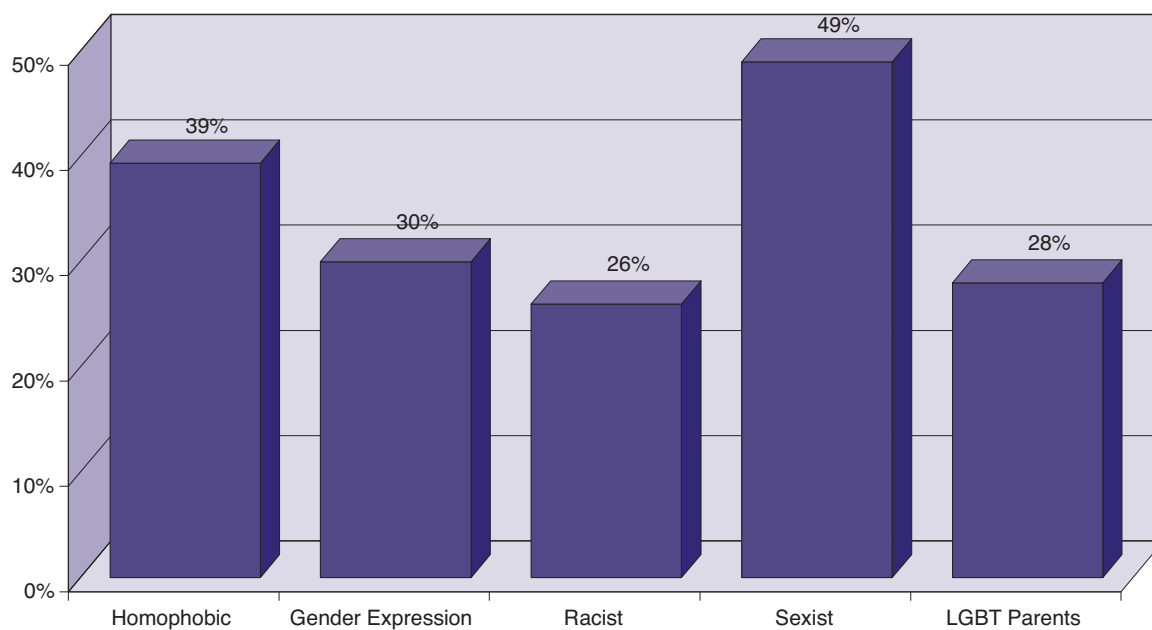
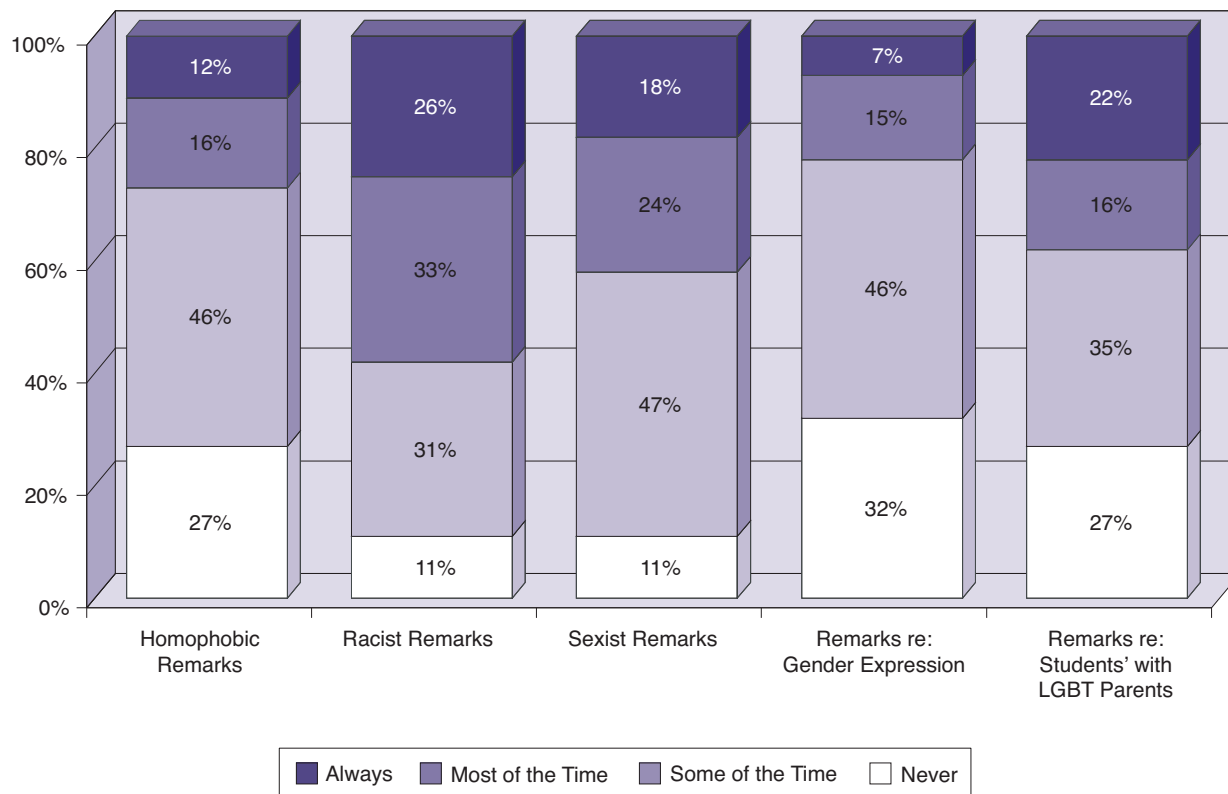


Figure 14. Students' Reports on Frequency of Intervention by School Staff When Hearing Biased Language in School



verbally harassed in the past year because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. A fifth (21%) of all students had been verbally harassed at school both because of their family constellation and because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

Being the target of frequent harassment can severely affect a student’s access to her or his education. As shown in Figures 17a and 17b, students who reported high levels of harassment were much more likely to report that they missed classes or entire days of school because of feeling unsafe. For example, compared to students who were never or rarely harassed at school, students who experienced high levels of harassment because of having LGBT parents were more than three times as likely to miss classes (34% vs. 10%) and four times as likely to miss entire days of school (44% vs. 11%) because they feared for their safety.⁶²

Figure 15. Students’ Reports on Frequency of Verbal Harassment in the Past Year

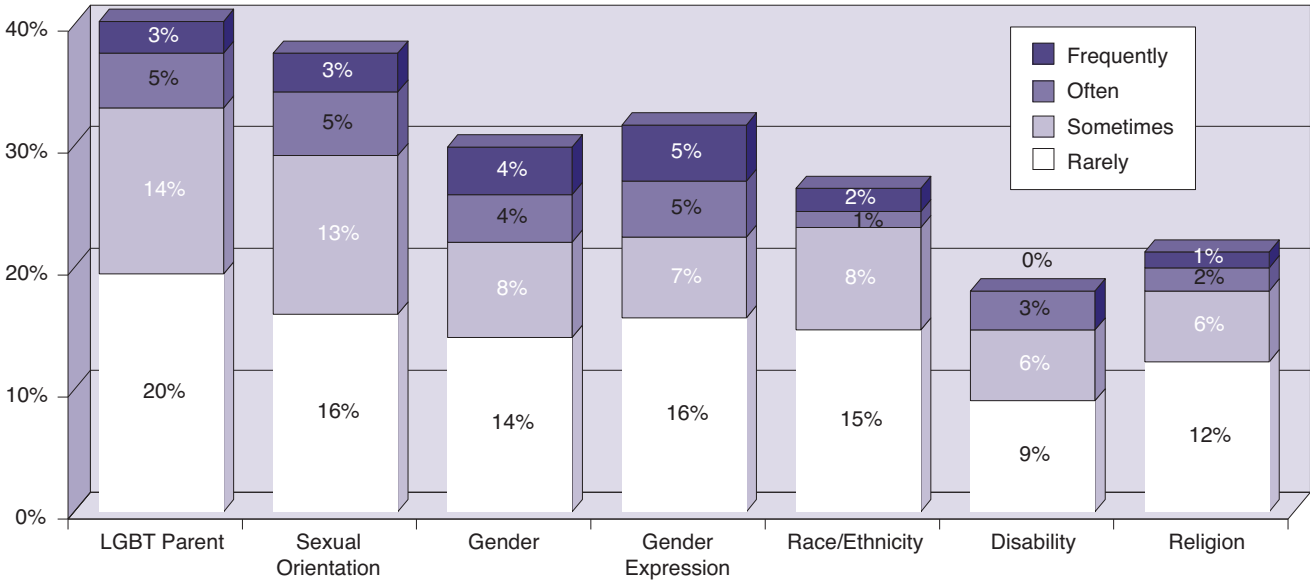


Figure 16. Percentage of Students Experiencing Verbal Harassment Based on Family Constellation and/or Own Sexual Orientation

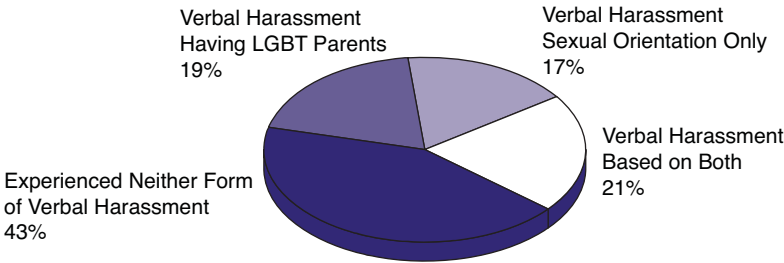


Figure 17a. Relationship Between Severity of In-School Harassment and Missing Classes
(all differences statistically significant, $p < .05$)

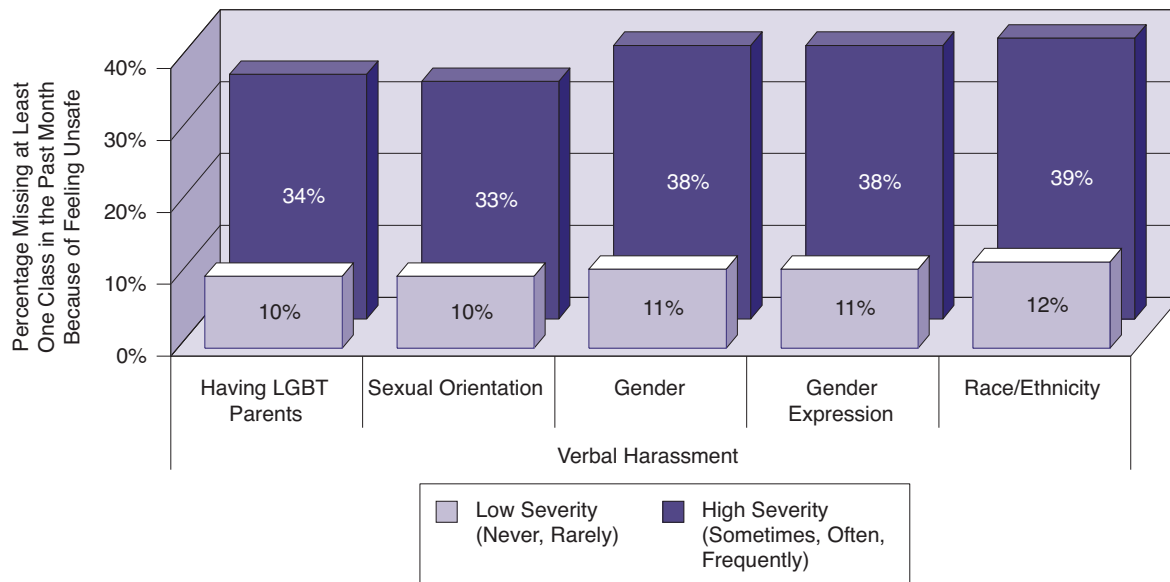
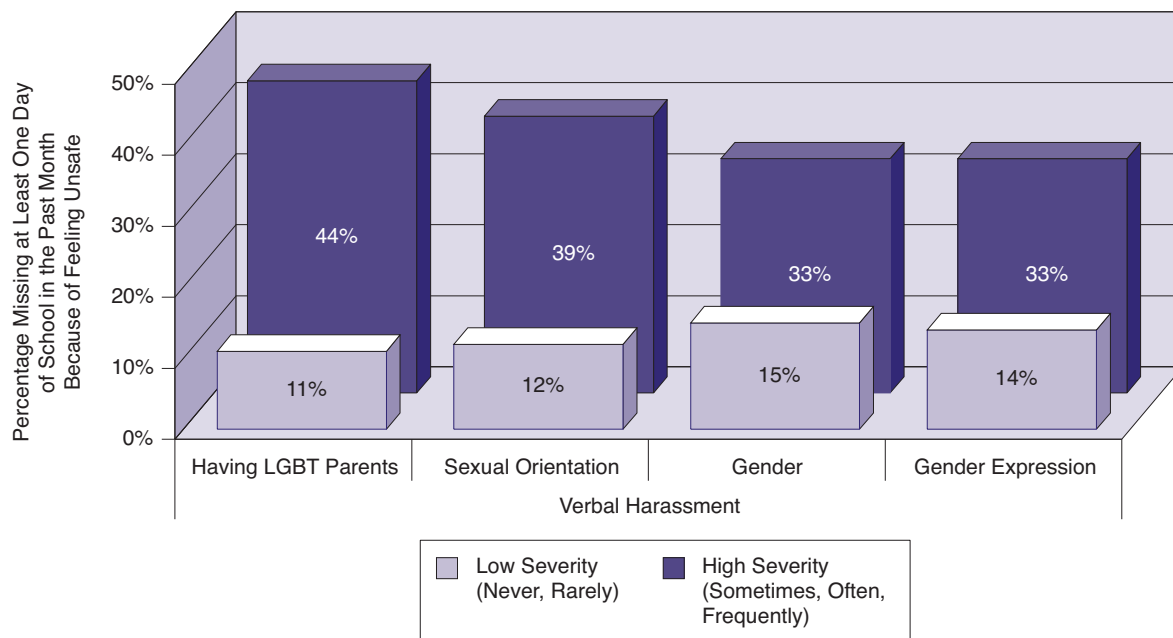


Figure 17b. Relationship Between Severity of In-School Harassment and Missing Days of School
(all differences statistically significant, $p < .05$)



Students’ Experiences of Physical Harassment and Assault. For some students, experiences of victimization did not end with verbal offenses but escalated to physical harassment (e.g., being shoved or pushed) and assault (e.g., being punched or injured with a weapon). Although these events were not as common as verbal harassment, they were not uncommon.⁶³ As shown in Figure 18, about a tenth of students had been physically harassed or assaulted in the past year because they had LGBT parents (12%), because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation (11%) or because of their gender (11%) or gender expression (13%).

As with verbal harassment, students with LGBT parents may experience physical forms of harassment or assault because of having LGBT parents or because they themselves are LGBT or others assume that they are LGBT. As shown in Figure 19, nearly a fifth of students had reported either type of LGBT-related physical harassment or assault and 5% reported both.

Figure 18. Percentage of Students Physically Harassed or Assaulted in the Past Year

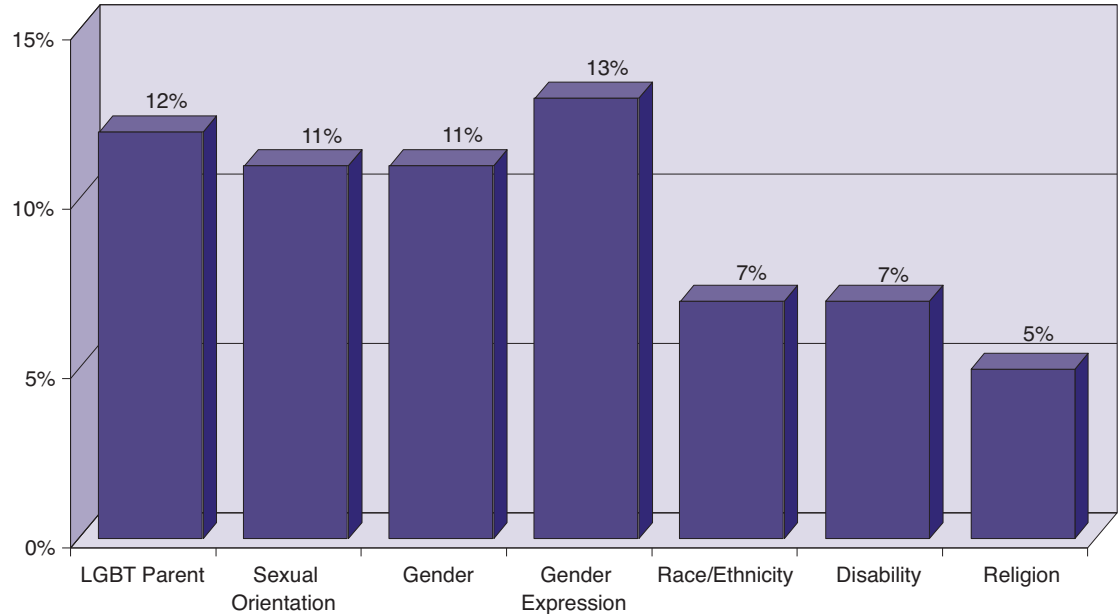
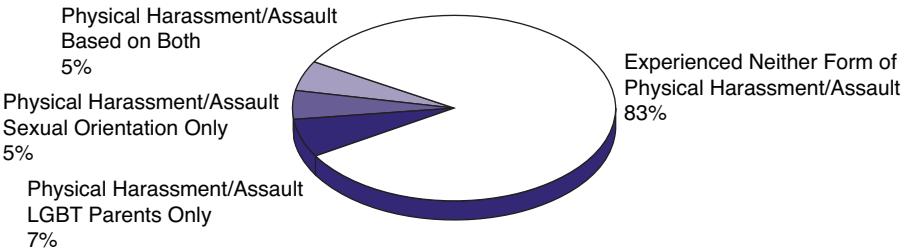


Figure 19. Percentage of Students Experiencing Physical Harassment or Assault Based on Family Constellation and/or Own Sexual Orientation

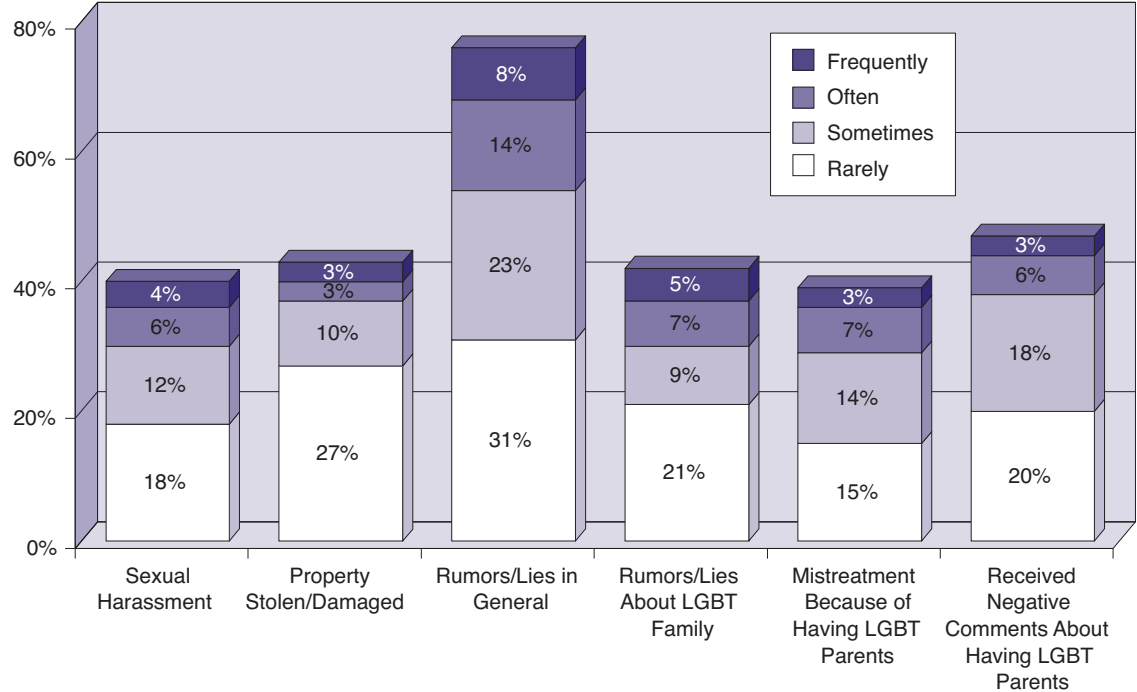


Students’ Experiences of Other Types of Harassment and Mistreatment by Their Peers

Students may also experience victimization events in school that are not clearly related to a personal characteristic. Unlike the previously discussed frequencies of verbal harassment and physical harassment and assault, students were not asked whether these types of harassment were specifically related to a personal characteristic. For example, a student may be the target of mean rumors or lies because of their sexual orientation or race or for no apparent reason. Thus, we asked students about other types of harassment they may have experienced at school, such as being sexually harassed or having their property deliberately damaged.

As Figure 20 illustrates, 40% of students had experienced sexual harassment (e.g., receiving sexual remarks or someone touching their body inappropriately) at school, and 43% had their property stolen or deliberately damaged at school in the past school year. Relational aggression—harm caused by damage to peer relationships—is a common type of harassment occurring in schools. The students in our survey were asked how often they had experienced one of the most common forms of relational aggression—the spreading of mean rumors or lies about a peer. Students were asked two questions with regard to rumors and lies: the first asked how often they had rumor/lies spread about them in general (or for no specific reason),

Figure 20. Students’ Reports on Frequency of Other Types of Harassment in the Past Year



and the second asked how often they had rumor/lies spread about them specifically because they had an LGBT parent. Three-quarters (76%) had rumors or lies spread about them in general in the past year, and 22% said this had occurred often or frequently. Many students (42%) reported having rumors or lies spread about them in school specifically because they had an LGBT parent (12% reporting often or frequently).

Students with LGBT parents may be subjected to other forms of mistreatment in school, mistreatment which they may not describe as being harassment or assault. In order to better understand the unique experiences of students with LGBT parents, they were asked how often they had experienced other kinds of mistreatment or received negative comments from their peers specifically because they had an LGBT parent. In addition, students were asked about other negative experiences they may have experienced, such as being excluded from classroom activities, because of their family structure. More than a third (40%) of the students had experienced mistreatment by other students at school specifically because they had an LGBT parent, and almost half (47%) had received negative comments from their peers for this reason (see [Figure 20](#)).

Demographic Differences in Students' School Experiences of Victimization

GLSEN's mission is to make all schools safe for all students. Whereas many students with LGBT parents experience harassment in school based on their family constellation or their actual or perceived sexual orientation, many experience further harassment based on other personal characteristics, such as race/ethnicity or gender. Thus, we examined whether there were differences in the experience of school climate based on sexual orientation, race/ethnicity and gender in order to understand more fully the experiences of students with LGBT parents.

Comparisons by Sexual Orientation. Students who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) were much more likely to report feeling unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation (57% vs. 13%) and gender expression (39% vs. 11%) than non-LGB students.⁶⁵ In addition, LGB students experienced higher levels of victimization at school than their peers (see Figures 21 and 22). For example, LGB students were more than four times as likely to have experienced verbal harassment based on their sexual orientation (81% vs. 18%) and more than twice as likely to have been verbally harassed based on their gender (47% vs. 21%).⁶⁶ LGB students were also more likely to have experienced physical harassment and assault based on their sexual orientation, gender and gender expression than students who were not LGB.⁶⁷ Even though LGB students experienced more harassment, it is important to note that about one in ten non-LGB students reported having been harassed because other students perceived them to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. This finding demonstrates that heterosexual students may experience harassment

Figure 21. Students' Experiences of Verbal Harassment by Sexual Orientation

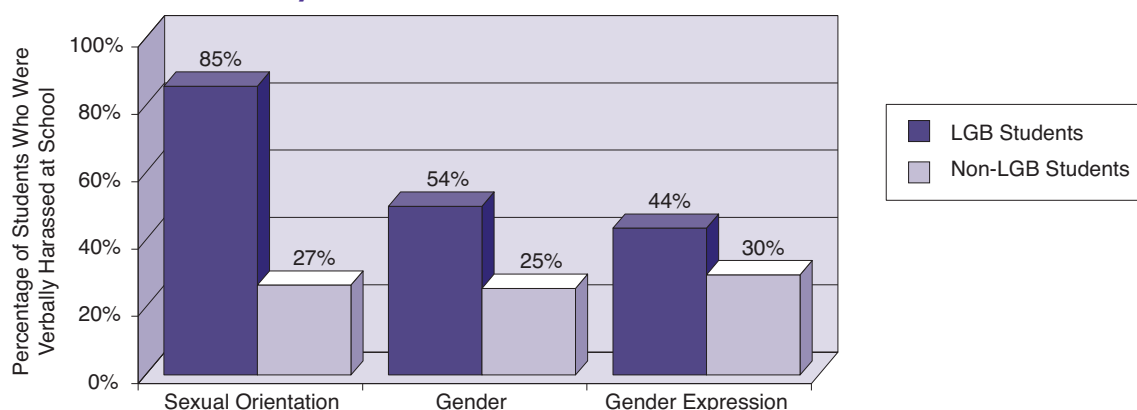
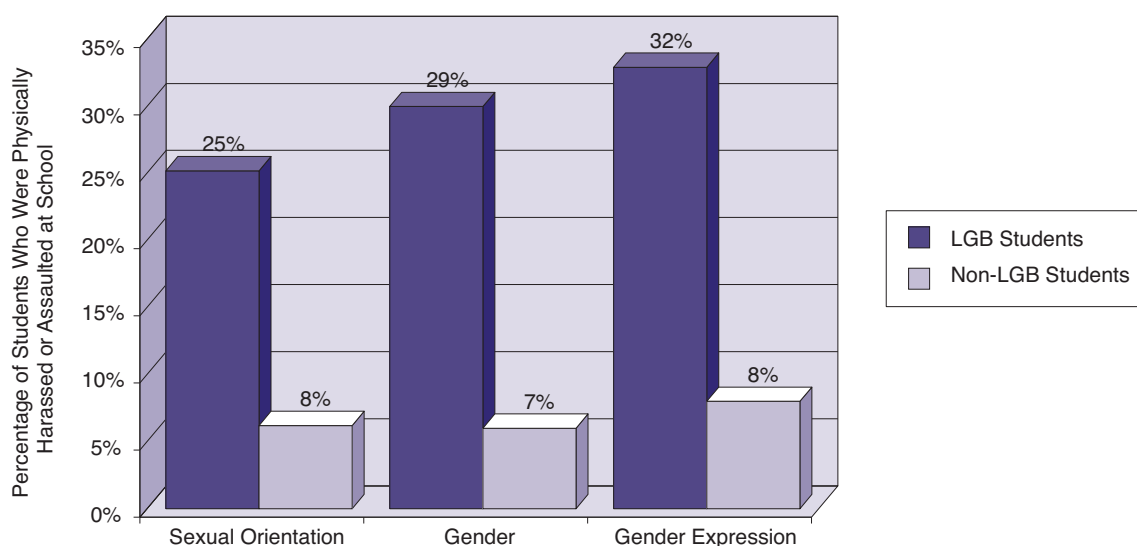


Figure 22. Students' Experiences of Physical Harassment and Assault by Sexual Orientation



because other students believe that they are LGB simply because their parents are LGBT.

Although one might expect there to be differences between LGB and heterosexual students in their experiences of harassment based on sexual orientation, it is interesting to note that the only other significant differences in victimization were those related to gender and gender expression. Although LGB students were in the minority in the sample, differences in gender-based victimization may be a result of the greater number of LGB female students in our study. Our sample of students in this study was predominately female; the female students in the sample were more likely to identify as LGB than male students in the sample, and female students historically report more in-school victimization based on gender than male students. Nevertheless, these findings may also speak to the relationship between sexual orientation and gender and to the ways in which homophobia and bias about

“gender-appropriate” behavior and appearance intersect. Previous research has demonstrated how sexual orientation, gender and gender expression are inextricably linked, particularly for LGBT students: students who are LGBT often experience higher levels of victimization based on sexual orientation, gender and gender expression than non-LGBT students, and students who have a non-normative gender expression are often targets for harassment as they are perceived to be lesbian or gay.⁶⁸

Comparisons by Gender. There were some significant differences by gender in reported experiences of safety and harassment.⁶⁹ None of the male students in the study reported feeling unsafe because of their gender compared to more than a tenth of female students (14%).⁷⁰ In addition, whereas about a fifth of male students reported that they had been verbally harassed in school based on gender, 35% of female students had experienced this form of harassment (see [Figure 23](#)).⁷¹ Female students were almost twice as likely to have been sexually harassed at school compared to male students (47% vs. 25%), and were also more likely to have experienced relational aggression (81% vs. 64%).⁷² Male students were more likely, however, to report experiencing harassment that was physical in nature: 20% had been physically harassed or assaulted at school because they had an LGBT parent, compared to 8% of female students.⁷³

Comparisons Between Students of Color and White Students. We also found significant differences in the experiences of students of color versus white students in our study, with regard to negative experiences related to their race or ethnicity.⁷⁴ As shown in [Figure 24](#), students of color in our study were more likely to report feeling unsafe at school because of their race or ethnicity than white students (12% vs. 3%).⁷⁵ Students of color were also more likely to report that they experienced harassment and assault at school based on their race or ethnicity. Almost half (43%) of the students of color had experienced racially or ethnically motivated verbal harassment at school, compared to 18% of their white peers.⁷⁶ Sixteen percent of students of color reported being physically harassed or assaulted at school because of their race/ethnicity, versus only 2% of white students (see also [Figure 24](#)).⁷⁷

Comparisons by School Type and Level. We were also interested in whether students’ experiences varied by the type (public, private-religious, private-other) and level (middle or high school) of school they attended, and found some differences in terms of students’ being discouraged by school staff from talking about their family or LGBT parent in school. Students who were in religious-affiliated private schools were almost twice as likely as students in public schools to have been discouraged by school staff (43% vs. 23%), and seven times as likely as students in non-religious private schools (43% vs. 6%).⁷⁸ High school students were twice as likely as middle school students to say that school staff had discouraged them from talking about their parents or family in school (27% vs. 13%).⁷⁹

Figure 23. Experiences of Harassment by Gender: Male vs. Female Students

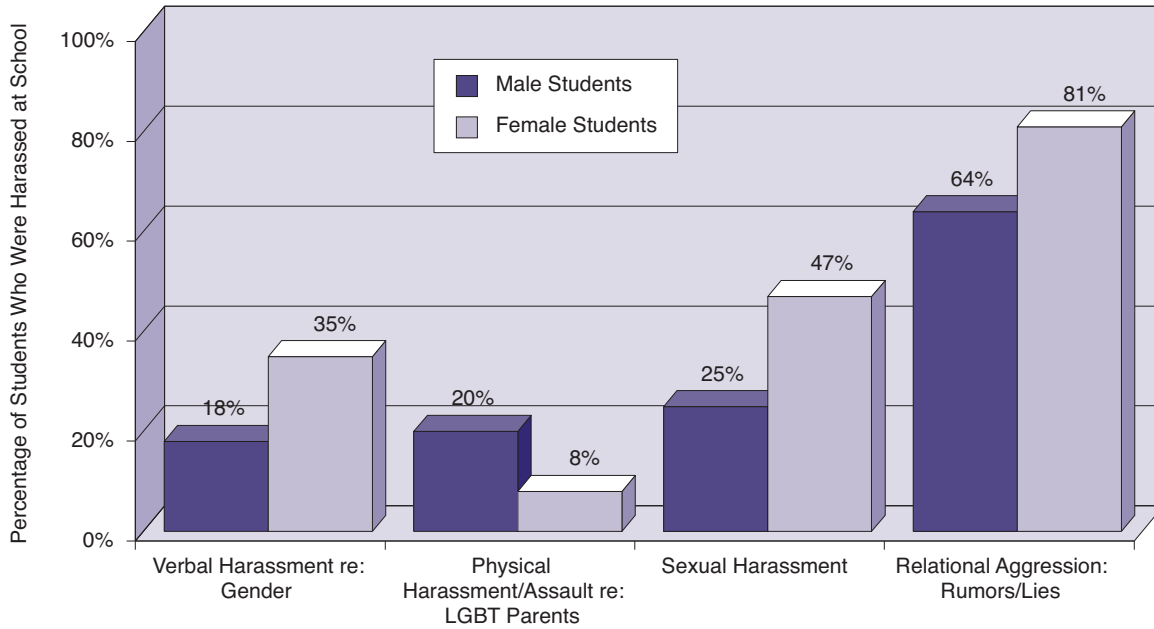
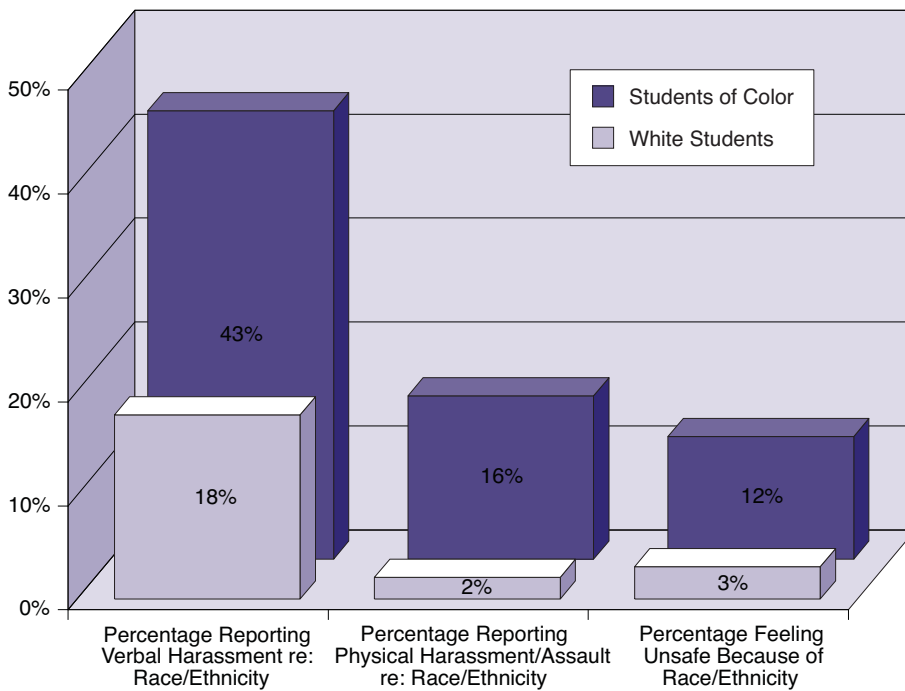


Figure 24. Experiences of Safety and Harassment Based on Race/Ethnicity: Students of Color vs. White Students



Comparisons with General Population of Secondary School Students

Given that this study was focused solely on the experiences of LGBT families, it does not provide any relative comparison with the experiences of students in general. The experiences of students from LGBT families may differ from the experiences of other students. For example, students with LGBT parents may experience unique forms of harassment not experienced by other students, such as being verbally harassed because they are from an LGBT family. Furthermore, because they may already experience victimization based on their family composition, students with LGBT parents may also be more likely to experience forms of harassment that more commonly occur in schools, such as harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation. For this reason, we compared the experiences of students with LGBT parents in this study with those of a national sample of secondary school students.⁸⁰ Specifically, we examined differences in experiences of verbal harassment, which were the most common forms of harassment, as well as sexual harassment, relational aggression (i.e., target of mean rumors or lies) and personal property damage in school.

Figure 25 shows significant differences between the two samples on harassment. Students with LGBT parents were somewhat more likely than the general population of secondary school students to report that they had experienced verbal harassment in school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, and an actual or perceived disability. Furthermore, students in the current study were more likely to have been sexually harassed in school (40% v. 25%) and more likely to have been the target of mean rumors or lies (75% v. 50%).⁸¹

We also examined differences in the frequency of skipping classes or missing days of school because of feeling unsafe and found that some students with LGBT parents may have more limited access to their education than students in general. Students in the current study were more than twice as likely to have skipped a class in the past year because of feeling unsafe (15% v. 6%) and to have missed at least one entire day of school also because of feeling unsafe (17% v. 5%).⁸²

Mistreatment by Adult Members of the School Community

Mistreatment did not always come from other students but also from adult members of the school community. Students were asked whether they had experienced mistreatment or had received negative comments from members of the school community, including teachers, the principal, other school staff and the parents of other students. As shown in Figure 26, students most commonly reported that they had negative interactions with parents of other students in their school: nearly a quarter of students had been mistreated by or

Figure 25. Comparisons of Students' Experiences of Verbal Harassment: Students with LGBT Parents vs. National Sample of Students

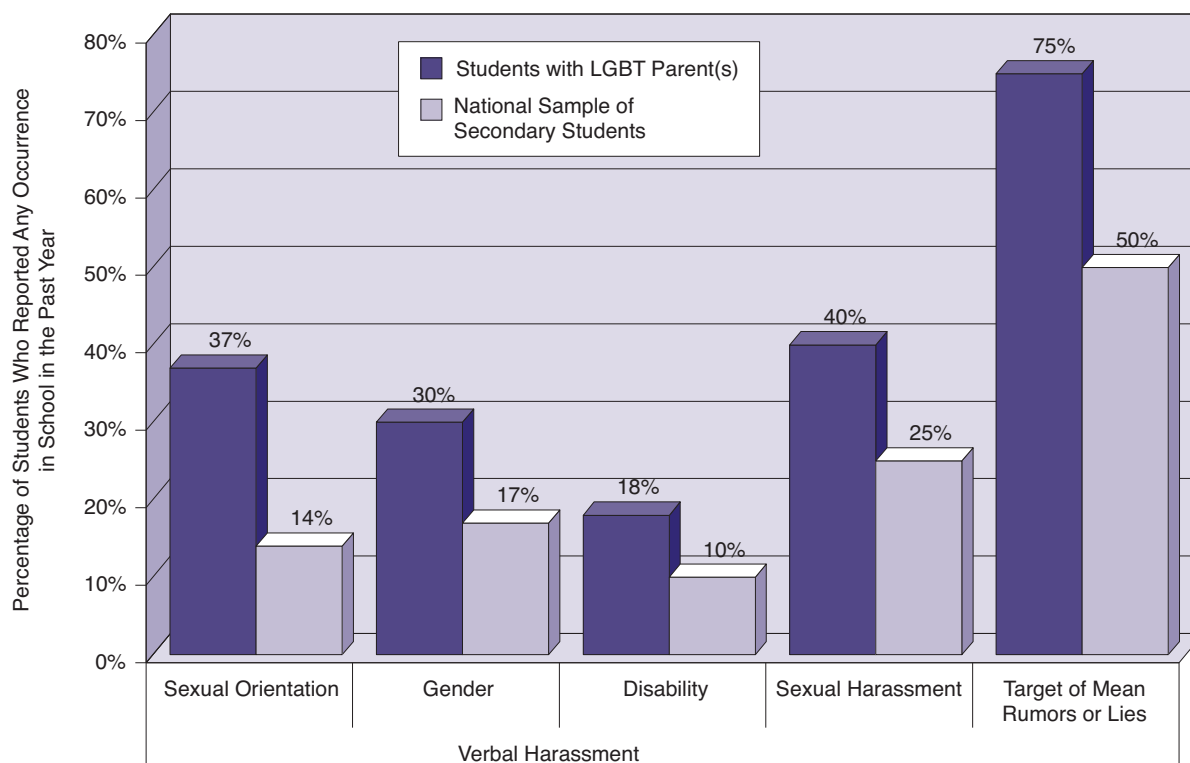
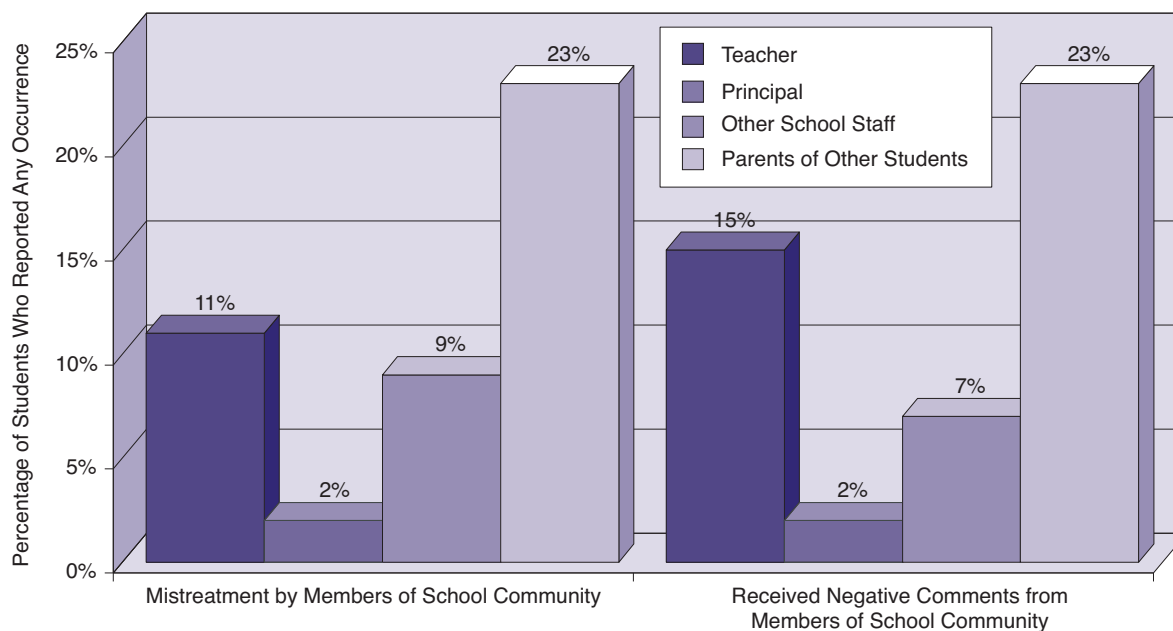


Figure 26. Other Negative Events in School Experienced by Students with LGBT Parents



received negative comments from the parents of other students because they had an LGBT parent (23% for both). About a tenth of the students also reported mistreatment or negative comments from a teacher (11% and 15%, respectively) and nearly a tenth reported such behaviors from other school staff.

What is particularly disturbing is the fact that so many students reported being mistreated by teachers and other staff at their school. Such actions, of course, may have direct, detrimental effects for the student with LGBT parents. Furthermore, any adult in the school community who mistreats a student because he or she has an LGBT parent, whether it is a teacher or another school staff person, may be sending a message to other students that there is something wrong with having an LGBT parent and that mistreating people who come from an LGBT family is acceptable. This message may influence how students react to and treat their peers who have an LGBT parent. There were, in fact, significant differences in relation to the behavior of school staff toward students with LGBT parents, and the behavior of other students. As shown in [Figure 27](#), all of the students who had been mistreated by teachers or by other school staff because they had an LGBT parent also reported being mistreated by their peers (versus only a third of students who had not been mistreated by school staff).⁸³ Furthermore, students who reported that they heard negative remarks about having an LGBT parent from staff at their school were much more likely to have heard these remarks from other students (see [Figure 28](#)).⁸⁴ These findings speak to the impact that the actions of teachers and other school personnel have on young people and to the importance of educating staff as well as students about family diversity and the importance of demonstrating respect for all types of families.

Students' Experiences of Exclusion and Discrimination in School

In our discussion of the parent-school relationship, we illustrated that many parents in the survey felt excluded from the school community or felt that they were not able to participate fully in school activities because of being LGBT. For the children of LGBT parents, exclusion from classroom activities, whether direct or indirect, may be yet another form of mistreatment in school and another indicator of a negative school climate. Thus, we asked students several questions in order to document how often they may have experienced feeling excluded from their school community specifically because they had an LGBT parent. When asked how often they had ever felt like they could not fully participate at school, 30% of students said that this occurred. Furthermore, about a fifth (22%) of students said that a teacher, principal or other school staff person had discouraged them from talking about their family at school, and more than a third (36%) had felt that school personnel did not acknowledge their LGBT family (e.g., not permitting one parent to sign a student's form because s/he was not the legal parent/guardian).

Figure 27. Mistreatment by Peers in Relation to Mistreatment by School Staff

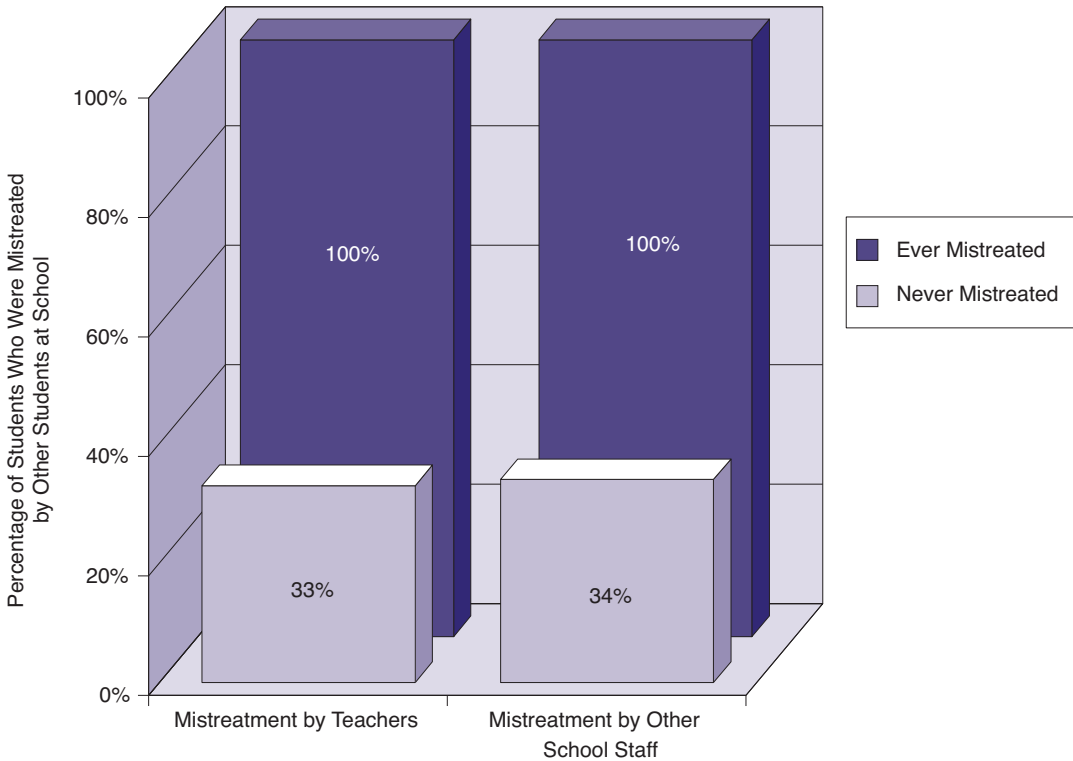
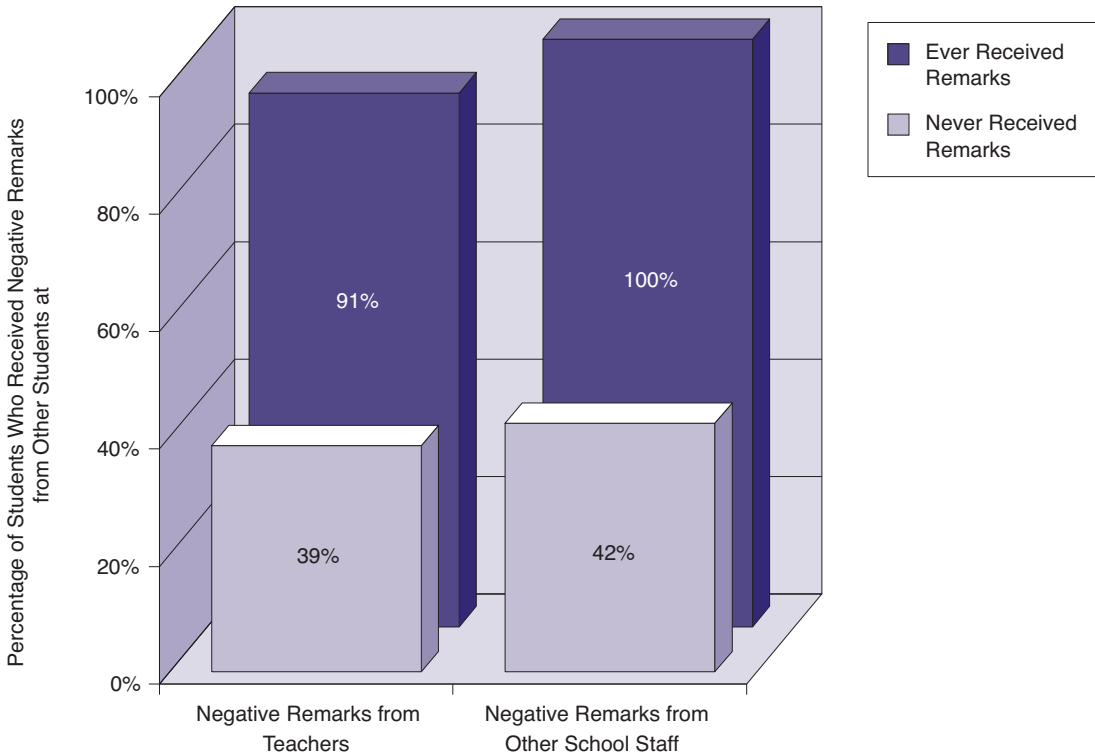


Figure 28. Negative Remarks from Peers in Relation to Negative Remarks from Teachers and Other School Staff



A fifth (20%) of students reported feeling excluded from school or classroom activities in the past school year specifically because they had LGBT parents. Students who said they had felt excluded were asked to describe a recent experience. There were three major themes across these students' experiences: 1) feeling excluded because they received negative responses about having LGBT parents, 2) feeling excluded because they were discouraged by school staff from being open about their parents or family, and 3) feeling excluded because LGBT families were not included in school activities.

Negative Responses to LGBT Families. Many students described situations where they felt excluded because they did not feel they could talk openly about their family at school without there being negative repercussions. Several students commented that they did not want their peers to know that they had an LGBT parent, often for fear of being harassed or receiving negative comments from other students. For example, a 7th grade student did not discuss her family at school because she was "afraid of getting made fun of for having 2 moms and not a 'normal' family." During a classroom discussion about families, a 9th grader described how he talked about "generic things" rather than share real details about his family. A student in the 8th grade described how other students reactions to discussion about LGBT people caused her to avoid mentioning her own family:

When people and our teacher talk about LGBT people in class and everyone laughs because they think it's gross or something I feel uncomfortable because I'm the only one not laughing. It's like there [they're] making fun of me in a way.

Some students avoided talking about their parents in school because they had already experienced negative responses. For example, a student in the 10th grade described how he was "verbally attacked at a school dance because his Mom is Gay" and the event became physically violent when both students "started punching each other." An 11th grade student described the following experience:

In speech class we were told to tell a speech about the person who has influenced us the most. I wanted to talk about my mother, who is a lesbian. Students made comments on how a "sinner" couldn't be a good influence.

Discouraged from Being Open About Family by Faculty/School Staff. Several students described feeling excluded because teachers or other school staff discouraged them from talking about their family at school or from including their parents in school events:

In Spanish [class], we were doing a project that involved describing our home and introducing our family. I talked to my teacher and explained my situation, and she said it would be better for me to say i had a single mother and not mention her partner at all. It made me mad, so I made a point of including my other mom, and I ended up failing the project. (11th grader)
We had a dance team banquet and we were supposed to have

our parents come, but our directors said it would be better if i only brought one of my moms so i would not cause a disruption. (9th grader)

They said I couldn't put a picture of my parents kissing on a picture collage even though other children could. (9th grader)

I was doing a family tree and got told to put my step mom down as an aunt... (8th grader)

School Activities Not Inclusive of LGBT Families. Many students described situations where they felt excluded from classroom activities, particularly activities that involved discussion of families, because there were no representations of LGBT families or the activity was based on the assumption that students' came from "traditional" families with two heterosexual parents. For example, an 8th grade student described the following experience about completing a class assignment:

I was told on the worksheet to list my extended family. There [were] options of what to put about divorced families and etc., but nothing about lesbian parents. I felt excluded and bad so I didn't complete the assignment.

Another 8th grade student described how her "teacher insisted I put my birth mother and birth father" on her family tree. A student in the 12th grade explained a recent incident as follows:

My biology class discussed genetics and my class assignment was to go home and record the hair color, eye color and other physical attributes of my MOTHER AND FATHER, when I returned my information with the data from my two mothers, my teacher told me I had done the assignment wrong and told me to go home and ask my mother about my father's attributes, as all students have a mother and father, and my mother must at least know the color of my father's eyes and hair.

In addition to classroom assignments, students described other types of experiences at school where their family structure was not acknowledged. For example, an 11th grader was not permitted to go home sick from school with his "other dad" unless the school had permission from his "first dad." A 12th grade student described difficulties in filling out parental information on college application forms:

College applications have a space for parent/guardian information, however, there is only space for two parents, under the titles: MOTHER and FATHER. This upset me not only because I have three "parents" but also because I am aware of many GLBTQ families who would not be able to fill out a form that is so rigid in its definition of parents.

Although most students in our survey did not report experiencing overt acts of exclusion or discrimination, many described situations in which they were kept from fully participating in school activities or events because they had LGBT parents (e.g., not having the option to

include both parents on a family tree; being told that they should not go out for sports because they had gay parents). Furthermore, some students described being subjected to biased remarks about LGBT parents (from teachers as well as students), and experiencing incidents of name-calling and harassment at school based on their family constellation.

Other Negative Events Experienced at School

About a quarter (24%) of students in our study said that in the past year they had experienced other negative events at school specifically because they had LGBT parents. These students were asked to describe a recent event and among those who provided a description, most described experiences in which they were harassed at school. For example, a student in the 10th grade wrote that he frequently heard derogatory remarks about his family in the school hallways. Several other students described incidents of homophobic name-calling and verbal harassment at school, incidents in which the students themselves were often the target:

People saying that I was a lesbian just because my moms were. (8th grader)

They called my dad a fag once [and] this kid called me a fag because of my dads. (7th grader)

When some people found out that my dad was gay they said "Oh, that explains why [name of respondent] acts like fag." (8th grader)

Called "devil's daughter" "Lesbo." Someone said "At least my mom's not gay" + "I'd kill myself if my mom was gay." (8th grader)

One 8th grade student commented that another student spread lies about her parent at school: "A girl at school told a lie that my mom was making out with another woman behind the bleacher at a school event."

Interestingly, some students described how some people at school questioned their athletic abilities based on the fact that they had LGBT parents. For example, a 10th grade student who had two gay fathers described how "some teachers do not think I should do sports because I have gay parents." A 12th grader reported:

I play basketball and softball and when my moms come to see me some of my peers insist on making fun of me and ask how I got into sports with no dad in the house...

Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault

Previous research on secondary school students has shown that students often do not report harassment to school officials or even their parents and the results from the current survey on students with LGBT parents were no exception.⁸⁵ Students who had experienced harassment and/or assault at school were asked how often they reported these events to school authorities. As shown in [Figure 29](#), less than half (48%) of students who had experienced verbal or physical harassment or physical assault at school in the past year said that they ever reported the incident to a teacher, principal or other school staff. Students were much more likely to report incidents to their own parent or guardian than to school staff or other family members—two-thirds (66%) indicated that they had told their parent or guardian about incidents of victimization. In addition, 43% of students said that they had reported incidents to a family member other than a parent or guardian.⁸⁶

Having a parent who is LGBT may make it easier for students to discuss problems with harassment in school, particularly for LGBT students. Compared to available data on the experiences of LGBT students, students in our study who were LGBT were much likelier to report incidents of harassment or assault to their parents.⁸⁷ About two-thirds (67%) of LGBT students with LGBT parents said they had ever reported harassment to a parent or guardian, with more than a quarter (29%) doing so always. Less than half (41%) of the LGBT students in GLSEN's 2005 National School Climate Survey ever reported harassment to a parent or guardian and only 8% reported doing so always. Unfortunately, we do not have comparable data for non-LGBT students so we cannot determine whether all students with LGBT parents are more likely to report harassment to their parents.

Parents were also asked about their level of awareness of their child's experiences in school with regard to harassment. In particular, parents were asked how often their child had told them about being harassed, bullied or having problems with other students at school, in general, and because of having an LGBT parent, specifically. As shown in [Figure 30](#), over half (58%) of parents reported that their child had ever told them about being harassed in school for any reason, with nearly a quarter reporting at least some of the time ("Sometimes," "Often," or "Frequently"). A smaller percentage of parents disclosed that their child had told them about being bullied or harassed because of having an LGBT parent—28% of parents reporting any occurrence and 11% reporting at least sometimes. In general, parents of middle school students were more likely to report that their child told them about being harassed or bullied in school (see [Figure 31](#)). Parents of children in elementary school were less likely than other parents to report their child had been harassed or bullied because of having LGBT parents than secondary school parents.⁸⁸

Figure 29. Students' Reports on Frequency of Reporting Incidents of Harassment and Assault

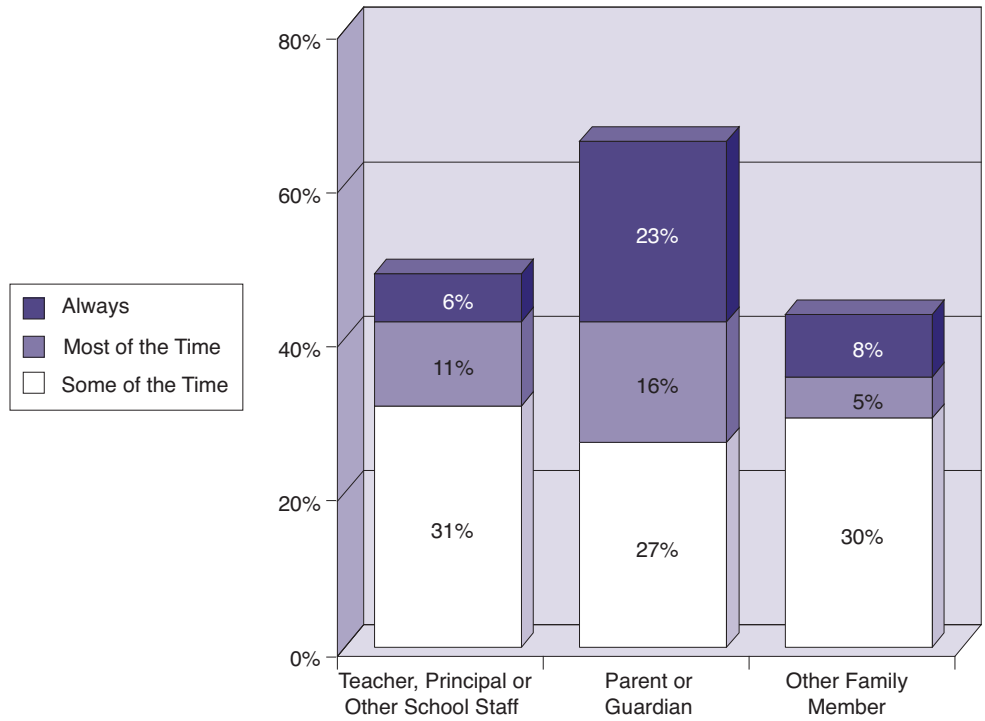


Figure 30. Parental Reports on Frequency of Harassment Child Has Experienced in School: General and Specific to Being From an LGBT Family

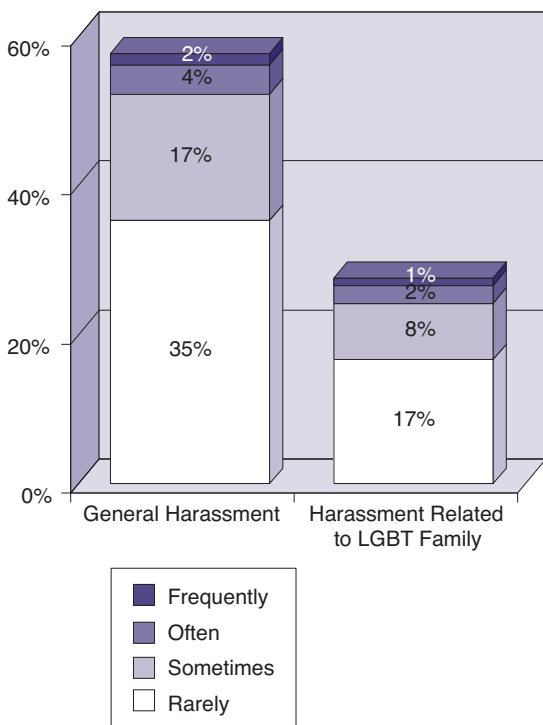
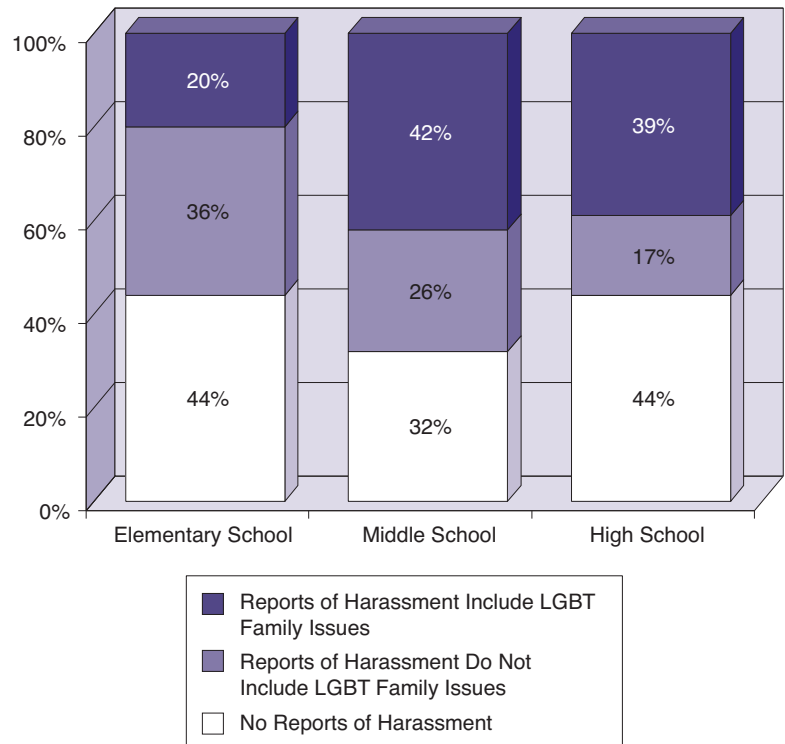


Figure 31. Parental Reports on Frequency of Harassment Child Has Experienced in School: General and Specific to Being From an LGBT Family



Parental Intervention with School Personnel Regarding Harassment

Students who had reported harassment to their parents or other family members were asked whether the adults had intervened on their behalf with school personnel. More than half (57%) of students who reported incidents to their parent/guardian said that their parent/guardian then talked with school staff, and a quarter of those who reported incidents to other family members said that they addressed the matter with school personnel.

Parents who had been told by their child that she or he had been harassed or bullied in school were also asked whether they had addressed the matter with school personnel. Not surprisingly, the frequency with which parents' intervened with school staff was related to the frequency with which their child reported harassment in school.

Figure 32 illustrates that a higher frequency of reported harassment was related to a higher frequency of intervention—whereas about half (47%) of parents whose child reported harassment rarely intervened with school personnel frequently or often, three-quarters (75%) of parents whose child reported harassment intervened frequently or often.⁸⁹ Given that we did not ask parents specific information about the nature of the harassment that their child reported to them, we cannot make any determinations about how LGBT parents decided to intervene or not intervene. Future research would be needed to understand parents' decision-making about when and how often they decide to speak to school staff about their child's harassment in school.

Parents were also asked how effective they believed the intervention to be and how receptive school personnel were. As shown in Figure 33, over half (52%) of these parents had addressed their child's being harassed frequently or often. When asked how effective their intervention with school personnel was, the majority of parents (77%) reported that it was very or somewhat effective (see Figure 34). The vast majority of parents also reported that the school personnel were receptive to them, with nearly two-thirds (64%) reporting that they were very receptive (see Figure 35).

Parent's level of intervention, their perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention and of staff's receptiveness to them varied significantly by school level (see Figure 36).⁹⁰ Parents of high school students were less likely to intervene than parents of elementary or middle school students. High school parents were also less likely to think their intervention was effective than elementary school parents. Although the majority of parents at all school levels found the school personnel to be receptive when they had intervened regarding their child's harassment in school, elementary school parents found them to be more receptive than other parents.

As with LGBT students, the problem still remains for students with LGBT parents that they do not report harassment to school

authorities and often do not think school personnel will effectively address the problem. Fortunately, most of the students with LGBT parents had told their parent or guardian when victimized in school and most also reported that the parent or guardian addressed the matter with the school. The reports from the LGBT parents in this study were consistent. The percentage of parents who reported being aware of their child being harassed was similar to the percentage of students reporting harassment. Furthermore, most parents in the study reported that they had addressed the harassment with the school. Thus, in contrast to other populations of students such as LGBT students, it appears that students with LGBT parents may have more supports in that they may feel they can talk to their parents about negative experiences in school, particularly if these experiences are related to their family or perhaps even to their own sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Figure 32. Relationship Between Parents Addressing Child Harassment with School Personnel and Frequency of Reported Harassment

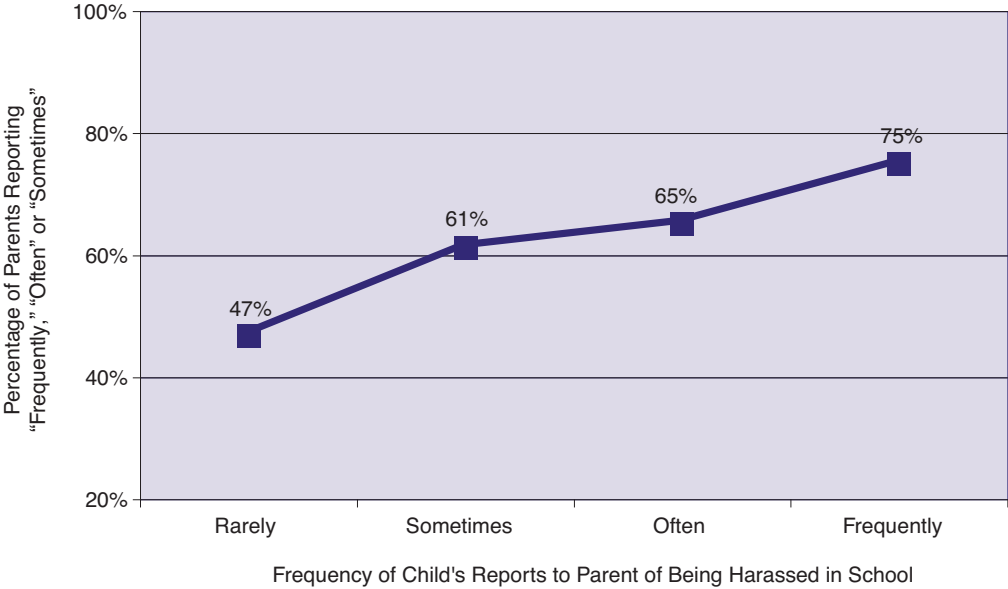


Figure 33. Parents' Reports on the Frequency of Addressing Bullying and Harassment with School Personnel

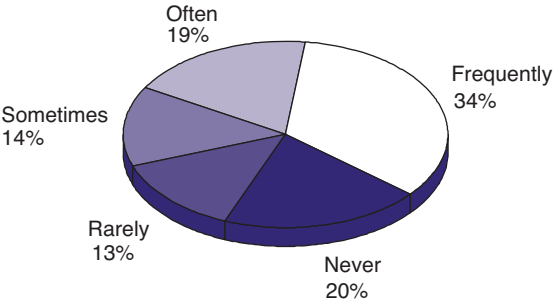


Figure 34. Parents' Reports of the Effectiveness of Addressing Bullying and Harassment with School Personnel

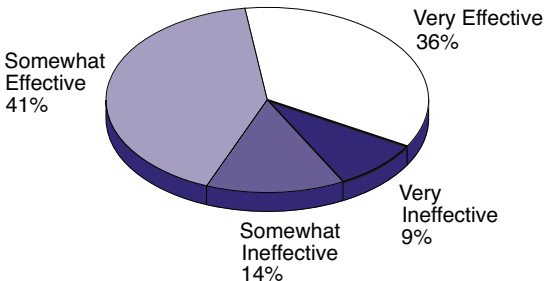


Figure 35. Parents' Reports of the Receptiveness of School Personnel to Parents' Addressing Bullying and Harassment

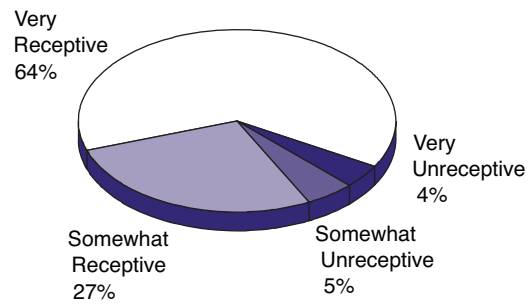
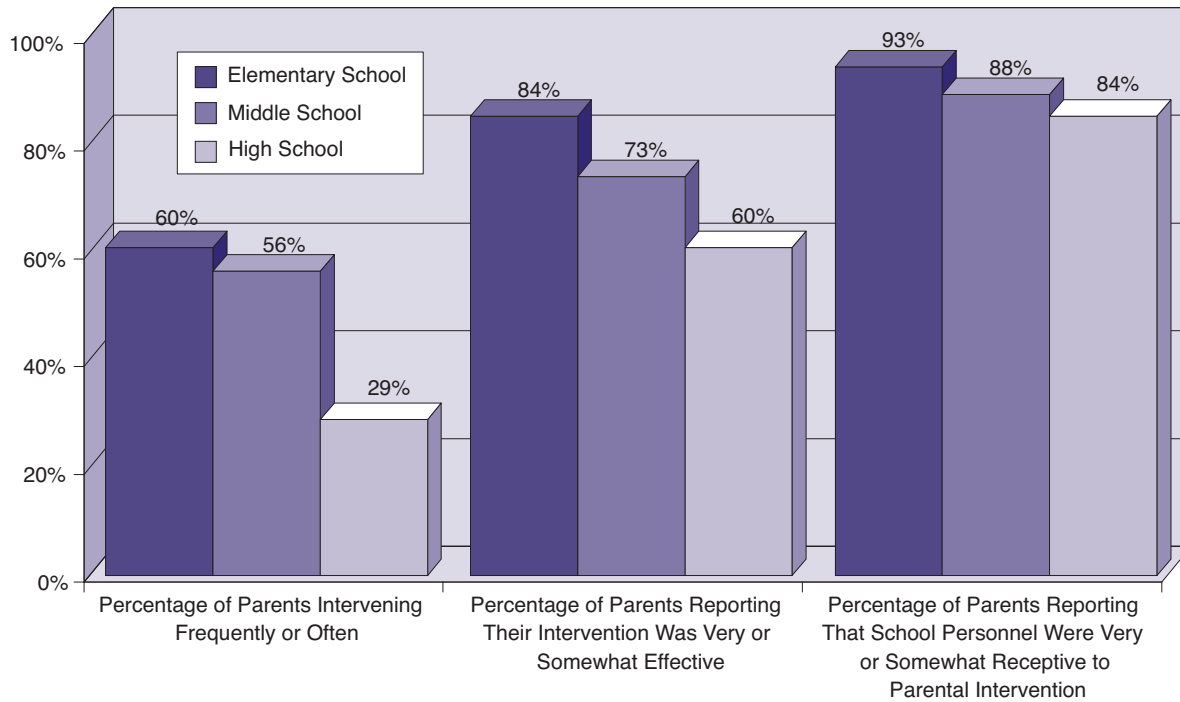


Figure 36. Parental Intervention Regarding Child's Harassment in School by School Level: Frequency of Intervention, Effectiveness and Receptiveness of Staff



Notes

- 58 Respondents were asked if they heard biased remarks from “a few of the students,” “some of the students” or “most of the students” at their school.
- 59 Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). *From teasing to torment: School climate in America, a survey of students and teachers*. New York: GLSEN.
- 60 Chi-square nonparametric test was used to compare the percentages of students in the LGBT Family study who heard biased language “often” or “frequently” with the percentages of students who heard biased language “often” or “very often” from the national population. Homophobic remarks: $\chi^2=10.3$, $df=1$, $p<.01$. Sexist remarks: $\chi^2=27.4$, $df=1$, $p<.001$. Racist remarks: $\chi^2=4.3$, $df=1$, $p<.05$.
- 61 Chi-square nonparametric test was used to compare the percentages of students in the LGBT family study who said that school staff intervened “most of the time” or “always” when hearing racist remarks with students who said that school staff intervened “often” or “very often” from the national population: $\chi^2=19.6$, $df=1$, $p<.001$.
- 62 Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. The variables for missing classes and missing days of schools were dummy-coded into new variables representing no occurrence/any occurrence of the event and were treated as dependent variables. The multivariate effect was significant for both independent variables: missing classes, Pillai's trace=.20, $F(7,144)=5.1$, $p<.001$; missing days of school, Pillai's trace=.17, $F(7,144)=4.3$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 63 The variables for physical harassment and physical assault were combined into new variables and dummy-coded to represent no occurrence/any occurrence of the event. Given the low incidence of physical harassment and assault, Figure 18 represents only whether students ever experienced the particular event, i.e., those who reported “rarely,” “sometimes,” “often” or “frequently.”
- 64 Given that this research question was examining harassment based on sexual orientation, we use “LGB” and not “LGBT” in this instance.
- 65 Chi-square tests were performed: Unsafe because of sexual orientation: $\chi^2=26.0$, $df=1$, $p<.001$, $\phi=.42$; unsafe because of gender expression: $\chi^2=13.7$, $df=1$, $p<.001$, $\phi=.30$.
- 66 Differences between groups were tested by multivariate analysis of variance. Percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. For verbal harassment, the multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's trace=.35, $F(7, 114)=8.8$, $p<.001$. The univariate effects were significant at $p<.05$.
- 67 The variables for physical harassment and physical assault were combined into new variables and dummy-coded to represent no occurrence/any occurrence of the event. Chi-square tests were performed. Physical harassment/assault based on sexual orientation: $\chi^2=7.2$, $df=1$, $p<.05$, $\phi=.22$. Physical harassment/assault based on gender: $\chi^2=11.3$, $df=1$, $p<.01$, $\phi=.28$. Physical harassment/assault based on gender expression: $\chi^2=11.5$, $df=1$, $p<.01$, $\phi=.28$.
- 68 D'Augelli, A.R., Grossman, A. H., & Starks, M. T. (2006) Childhood gender atypicality, victimization, and PTSD among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 21, 1462–1482.
Bochenek, M. & Brown, A. W. (2001). *Hatred in the hallways: Violence and discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students in U.S. schools*. New York: Human Rights Watch.
Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). *From teasing to torment: School climate in America*. New York: GLSEN.
Fineran, S. (2001). Sexual minority students and peer sexual harassment in high school. *Journal of School Social Work*, 11, 50–69.
Kosciw, J. & Diaz, E. (2006). *The 2005 National School Climate Survey: The school-related experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
- 69 Due to the low number of respondents who identified as transgender ($n=3$), this analysis compares female- and male-identified respondents only.
- 70 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=6.7$, $df=1$, $p<.01$, $\phi=.22$.
- 71 Differences were examined using independent samples t-tests and percentages are for illustrative purposes. The t-statistic was significant: $t=-4.1$, $df=130.3$, $p<.001$.
- 72 Differences were examined using independent samples t-tests and percentages are for illustrative purposes. The t-statistic was significant for both sexual harassment ($t=-3.447$, $df=123.8$, $p=.001$) and relational aggression ($t=-2.4$, $df=139$, $p<.05$).
- 73 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=3.8$, $df=1$, $p=.05$, $\phi=.17$.
- 74 “Students of color” were respondents who identified as African American, Latino or Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, or multiracial. It does not represent a monolithic group and we recognize that there may be significant differences in the experiences of youth who are categorized as “students of color.” Due to the small size of the overall sample and the relatively small number of respondents who were students of color, we were unable to examine differences between or within the different racial/ethnic groups of respondents (e.g., the experiences of African American youth compared to white youth, or differences by gender within a racial/ethnic group).
- 75 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=4.3$, $df=1$, $p<.05$, $\phi=.17$.
- 76 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. Differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance, using all the variables for verbal harassment. The multivariate effect was marginally significant, Pillai's trace=.09, $F(7,136)=2.0$, $p=.05$. Verbal harassment based on race/ethnicity: Univariate effects were significant ($p=.001$). Additional analysis was conducted using an independent t-test and the t-statistic was significant: $t=2.9$, $df=71.4$, $p<.01$.
- 77 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=9.6$, $df=1$, $p<.05$, $\phi=.26$.

- 78 Percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. Group differences were examined using one-way analyses of variance. There were significant mean differences: $F(2, 148) = 3.3, p < .05$. Post hoc t-tests were significant at $p < .05$.
- 79 Percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. Differences were examined using independent samples t-test. The t-statistic was significant: $t = 2.6, df = 144.8, p = .01$.
- 80 Harris Interactive, Inc. & GLSEN Study: 2005 Data File. New York: GLSEN.
- 81 Differences between samples were tested by a multivariate analysis of covariance and percentages shown are for illustrative purposes. Because of the larger percentage of students identifying as LGB in the family study, LGB status was used as a covariate. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's trace = .01, $F(9, 3434) = 4.9, p < .001$. Because of the large sample size in the Harris Interactive and GLSEN study, univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$.
- 82 The percentages given are for illustrative purposes. Differences between samples were tested by a multivariate analysis of covariance controlling for LGB status. The multivariate effect was significant: Pillai's trace = .01, $F(2, 3501) = 19.4, p < .001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p < .01$ and were significant for both dependent variables.
- 83 Mistreatment by teachers and mistreatment by students: $\chi^2 = 25.6, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = .43$. Pearson correlation for original interval level variables: $r = .58, p < .001$. Mistreatment by other school staff and mistreatment by students: $\chi^2 = 21.4, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = .37$. Pearson correlation for original interval level variables: $r = .53, p < .001$.
- 84 Negative remarks from teachers and negative remarks from students: $\chi^2 = 20.8, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = .37$. Pearson correlation for original interval level variables: $r = .42, p < .001$. Negative remarks from other school staff and negative remarks from students: $\chi^2 = 13.7, df = 1, p < .001, \phi = .30$. Pearson correlation for original interval level variables: $r = .42, p < .001$.
- 85 Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). *From teasing to torment: School climate in America*. New York: GLSEN.

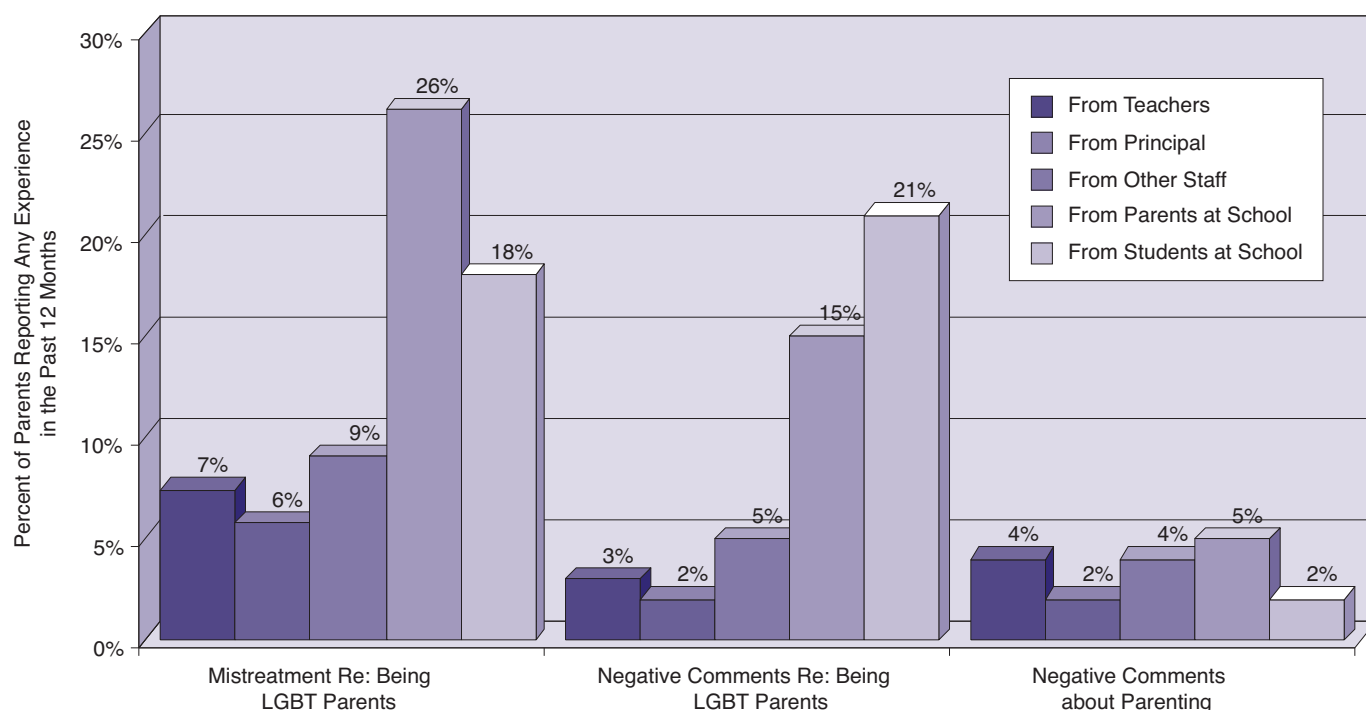
Kosciw, J. & Diaz, E. (2006). *The 2005 National School Climate Survey: The school-related experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
- 86 Differences were examined using paired samples t-tests: "reporting to parents/guardians" versus "reporting to school staff:" $t(63) = -4.4, p < .001$; "reporting to parents/guardians" versus "reporting to other family members:" $t(62) = 4.4, p < .001$.
- 87 GLSEN National School Climate Survey Study: 2005 Data File. New York: GLSEN. Chi-square nonparametric test performed to compare the percentage of LGBT students in the LGBT Family study who reported incidents of harassment/assault to their parents with the percentage of students from the 2005 NSCS: $\chi^2 = 4.0, df = 1, p < .05$.
- 88 To examine differences in types of bullying and harassment by school level, we computed a new variable indicating whether a child had reported: no harassment, harassment in general but not including LGBT-related harassment and harassment including LGBT harassment. Differences across categories by school level were significant: $\chi^2 = 34.1, p < .001, df = 4$, Cramer's V = .24.
- 89 Percentages are for illustrative purposes. The relationship between frequency of reported harassment and frequency of parental intervention was tested using correlation: Pearson $r = .18, p < .001$.
- 90 Differences across school type were tested by a series of oneway analyses of variance: Frequency of intervention, $F(2, 329) = 8.7, p < .001$; Effectiveness, $F(2, 252) = 4.5, p < .01$; Receptiveness: $F(2, 263) = 6.1, p < .01$. Post-hoc group comparisons were considered at $p < .05$. Percentages shown in Figure 32 are for illustrative purposes.



Parents' Negative Experiences in School or With School Personnel

For students of LGBT parents, bullying and harassment may affect their in-school relationships and their ability to learn and be part of the school community. For LGBT parents, negative experiences related to being LGBT or to their family constellation may affect their relationship with school personnel. Thus, we were interested in understanding whether the LGBT parents in our study had had any negative experiences at school or with school personnel related to their LGBT family. Specifically, parents were asked whether they had experienced any mistreatment, heard negative comments about being LGBT or received negative comments about parenting from various members of the school community: teachers, principals, other school staff, other parents at school and students at school. Overall, as shown in [Figure 37](#), LGBT parents reported a relatively low incidence of negative experiences from school personnel. However, they were more likely to have reported mistreatment and hearing negative comments about being LGBT from other parents and from students at the school. A quarter (26%) of LGBT parents in the survey reported mistreatment from other parents and nearly a quarter (21%) reported hearing negative comments about being LGBT from students at the school. There were no significant differences in the frequency of parental mistreatment or negative experiences at school by the type of school (public, private-religious, private-other) or the school level (elementary, middle, high school).

Figure 37. Parents' Negative Experiences with School Community



Types of Negative Experiences

In addition to the specific negative experiences queried, parents were also asked whether they had experienced other discrimination or negative events at their child's school related to being an LGBT parent. Again, about a quarter (25%) of parents reported they had experienced some additional type of negative event in the past year. Parents who indicated that they had experienced a negative event or mistreatment at their child's school in the past year were given the opportunity to describe a recent event. A total of 130 parents provided a description of their experiences. Several major themes emerged from the analysis of responses: exclusion from the school community, hostile behavior from school staff and parents, dealing with general discomfort and ignorance and having one's parenting skills called into question because of being an LGBT parent.

Exclusion from School Activities and Events. More than half (53%) of parents described various forms of exclusion from their school communities: being excluded or prevented from fully participating in school activities and events, being excluded by school policies and procedures, and being ignored and feeling invisible. Almost a fifth (15%) of parents described experiences of being or feeling excluded from activities in the school community. Parents described situations in which they, their partner or significant other,

and/or their child were not able to participate in school activities because they were an LGBT parent. For example, several parents described incidents in which their child was not able to fully participate in or were left out of school activities:

For mother's day my son's teacher did not allow him to make 2 items for each mother.

Only permitting my son to make one mother's day gift when clearly the teacher knows there are two mothers.

We are a lesbian couple and they had a few father and child activities that left us and our son out.

When the children were asked to make a family colage, [my child] included both sides of our family, when we went to parent night, hers had conveniently fallen off the wall and the teacher didn't have enough time to put it back up. The teacher told us we could just take it home with us.

The following are some of the comments from parents who described situations in which they or their partner/significant other were excluded from school activities because they were LGBT:

We have been told by our pastor that we cannot be an aid in our children's classes and that the two of us cannot be on the school campus at the same time.

There was a program on sexuality issues, and despite having talked with the principle numerous times about my skills and willingness to organize this, I did not know about a meeting regarding these issues until the day before....she was uncomfortable having me, as an out lesbian, be the leader of this program.

One parent talked about how she and her partner do not attend school events because they are afraid of possible negative repercussions:

"the only time I really feel mistreated is when my partner and I choose not to go to things with the school because of the fear someone might discriminate against us as a couple or a family."

Lack of Inclusive School Policies and Procedures. Some parents (12%) described situations in which they felt that the needs of their children and family were not addressed by their school. For example, the absence of positive representations of LGBT people and families from school curricula, and school policies that fail to acknowledge LGBT families were described. One parent said she/he often felt that they were not accepted in their school community "partly because the school [did] not do enough to educate the kids and staff about different kinds of families." Another parent commented that her/his "main concern with the elementary staff is their lack of materials which reflect families with same-sex parents." Furthermore, a couple of parents commented that their offers of assistance with regard to incorporating LGBT-inclusive materials into their child's school were ignored, dismissed or denied:

Dismissed would be a better word. The principal doesn't acknowledge a need for any additional training or understanding of GLBT families and she stated this curtly and repeatedly in our interactions with her.

I offered to read 'Heather has Two Mommies' to the class and the teacher said 'no.'

Many responses were about school policies that discriminated against LGBT parents by failing to acknowledge the status of partners as legitimate parents or guardians:

I didn't feel 'mistreated' but we were both annoyed with the school sending multiple letters home as if we were roommates or neighbors, when we both have children at that school (her one, my one).

My partner was not allowed to vote at our parent meeting because she is not considered a legal guardian.

When my son broke his collarbone at school my partner and I went to pick him up and the nurse didn't want to listen to her because she was not 'his parent.'

A few parents specifically mentioned district- and state-wide policies that prohibited schools from providing positive portrayals of lesbian and gay people:

[The] school board has a 'no promo homo' policy, so I can't, for example, volunteer to read a book with positive models of LGBT people:

It is hard to describe how one feels mistreated in the school here in [name of state]. We have state statute that says schools cannot promote positive images of gay/lesbian people. It is even against this policy that teachers aren't allow to post safe triangle stickers, although some at the high school have done so. I think some teachers and administrators would be more positive and receptive if they weren't restricted by state statute. Our daughter participated in the National Day of Silence and it was well received by her teachers as well as the student body. She commented in some of her classes over half the students participated.

Invisibility. A quarter (25%) of the parents who said they felt excluded from the school community experienced this exclusion as an overall feeling of neglect and invisibility. For example, a parent described feeling "shunned or ignored" and said that "people do not engage me like they do others, even when I am overtly helpful and friendly." Another parent said that although he/she had not experienced overt discrimination, he/she felt unwelcome and neglected in their child's school. Several other comments illustrate this experience:

[We] just don't get invited to participate or volunteer at school functions or outings

Not mistreat just cold towards us...at a parent teacher meeting

Being treated like not in the room when other parents are around

The teacher's assistant most always ignores my partner or is short with her, especially if she picks up my daughter without me.

When our daughter first started to attend the school all of the questions were directed to me and the teacher turned her back to my partner. This occurred several times initially, but after the first month it did not occur again. Also people always want to know who is the 'real' parent meaning who gave birth to our girls.

I have felt less mistreated than ignored, as the single Caucasian lesbian adoptive parent of two Latina girls. There are some economic assumptions (this is a wealthy liberal community) that are a struggle (cost of field trips etc.)

It was more neglect. The AP [Assistant Principal] could not bring herself to even acknowledge we were a lesbian couple. It came out as 'folks like you.'

Mostly I feel invisible.

Whereas many parents described being made to feel invisible, a few parents (6%) chose to not be out about their sexual orientation or gender identity to their child's school, often in order to protect their children from harassment and discrimination at school. For example, two parents said the following:

My son is very concerned about his peers and what they will think of my relationship. Since he is in middle school and there is a lot of homophobia among his peers, I have agreed to let him be the one to tell people. As far as I know, he has only told one other person.

This line of questions don't apply to my family because other than the principal, no faculty in my daughter's school is aware of our situation. Thankfully, our principal is supportive but suggested not sharing any personal information with teachers or parents because it's a Catholic school. We all agreed to allow my daughter to 'come out' as she felt comfortable.

Hostile Behavior. A little more than a quarter (27%) of parents described hostile behavior from school staff, parents and, at times, students. These experiences ranged from receiving "dirty looks" and hearing derogatory language to actual physical violence. For example, one parent said the following: "During my son's annual meeting with staff to discuss his special needs issues, when it came up that I have a 'partner' I was given dirty looks through the remainder of the meeting." Several parents had similar experiences:

There is nothing overt since this is [a major metropolitan area], but we know that comments are made behind our backs.

Mostly just stares and side-bar comments.

Hearing children, parents, and members of the school staff uttering the word 'fag'

Some parents described situations in which the behavior of school staff or other parents was overtly hostile toward them:

The school psychologist has been openly hostile...to both me and to my son.

Teacher refused to work with us on communication issues between her and our daughter.

A very conservative religious parent became upset because my partner was the Brownie troop leader at our school. She withdrew her daughter from the troop. Then, months later, she called the Girl Scouts to say that my partner was teaching inappropriate religious material (on Judaism) at a Catholic school.

Often it was parents' children, not themselves, who experienced such behavior at school:

My daughter was bullied by a lunch lady who insisted that every child has a daddy. When I followed up with the teacher, principal, and assistant superintendent they all conveyed to me that this was simply a 'misunderstanding' and a great deal of time and effort was spent to help me understand the lunch lady's perspective and 'background.' I repeatedly indicated that I want my child to be safe and respected at school and this includes respecting her family (two moms) experience.

My youngest daughter in 7th grade had a recent experience where one of her teachers said my daughter had a 'weird family'

My 9 year old daughter received pro-Christian, anti-gay literature in her backpack from a classmate. The child's mother indicated to the child that the pamphlets were because my child had parents that were going to hell-but that the mother loved my child anyway.

Teasing comments made by classmates of my son about having two mothers

At the fifth grade graduation my child did not want me to attend, and would not state a specific reason. Only to say that the other children gave her a hard time about me since I am not her birth mother.

One parent, who was also a teacher at her/his child's school, described an incident of verbal and physical violence:

My main problem is with other parents, I keep my personal life private because I work at the school my children attend. As a teacher, I don't feel I have to announce anything but other parents who have assumed that I'm a lesbian have made a point of spreading the word. There was also a teacher who thought it was her place to 'out' me to the other teachers at a meeting that I was not at. I have had to file a police report on a

parent for putting their hands on my son and screaming and calling me a 'stupid lesbian bitch' in the office while my stepson's class was passing.

General Sense of Discomfort in School. There were some parents who did not experience overt mistreatment or exclusion, but described experiencing a general discomfort at their children's schools. Feeling uncomfortable in their school community was often connected to feeling like a minority or outsider among other parents:

At a gymnastics meet there was a parent night and every parent was from a two person heterosexual white family and I felt uncomfortable because I was single and gay. We had introductions before the meet to the audience and it was so heterogeneous that anything different stood out.

Nothing has happened. I'm just not as comfortable sitting at events with my partner.

Parents get very quiet when I or my partner show up.

Some parents and staff are uncomfortable around our family.

This discomfort was also connected to encountering other individuals' lack of knowledge about LGBT people and families. For example, one parent remarked: "His teacher thought since I was his biological mother that I should be the only one making the decisions regarding our son. I quickly set her straight." Below are additional comments:

Mostly, I find the mistreatment in having to over-explain that my family is normal and that we do normal things like eat dinner at the table most nights, wash clothes and help with homework. I've had teachers ask me what we really do at home as though it's some big homo-erotic mystery.

"What do you mean, Johnny has two mothers?" That can't be right.

I feel that his last teacher was just confused and mixed both my partner and I up.

Parenting Skills Questioned by Members of the School

Community. A few parents (5%) described experiences in which school staff or other parents at their child's school questioned their parenting abilities specifically because they were LGBT:

An incident occurred with a teacher and one of the children. It was not sexual in nature, but the principal made a point to tell any other authorities that her parents were lesbians and tried to say the problem was possibly our daughter's fault because her parents were lesbian.

I had cross words with the principal regarding an attendance issue with my child and her need to be kept home periodically due to issues with her disability. He made a crack about attendance but I perceived it as a slur re our abilities as gay parents...

Our daughter's teacher told me that we should not have any more children when my daughter showed some signs of stress when we began foster-parenting our youngest daughter. This is none of her business and clearly a sign that she was uncomfortable with the configuration of our family...

The counselor said that I needed to have a member of the opposite sex talk to my child about making relationships with the opposite sex. Since my child would probably not feel comfortable talking with me; as I did not understand those sorts of relationships.

Mistreatment Based on Other Characteristics. There were a few parents (5%) who noted that they had experienced difficulty or mistreatment at their child's school because of other characteristics or issues not specifically related to being LGBT, such as their status as a single parent or their family income:

[One parent] was organizing a get-together for all the parents of my son's class. When I explained to her that, being a single parent, it's difficult for me to attend night meetings without my children, she said that, "obviously, you're not committed to your son's education." When I challenged her for raising her voice at my son, she called me a "coward" for bringing the issue up in an email.

Actually, the difficulty is more because I am a single, working mother and this is a very affluent school.

My battles with the school haven't been about glbt issues. They have been about Christian bias i.e. their obsession with Christmas holiday activities.

The school discriminates more against our child because he is Black than because we are gay. Race is a much bigger issue!

Mostly it is that it is a very small school and is part of a Catholic church, and most of the kids go to church there, as well as attend school. It is very 'clique-ish' and non-Catholics, in general, have a hard time fitting in. Sometimes I don't know if people are "snobby" acting because of that or because they know I'm a lesbian.

The universe of these comments is important in that it illustrates the many different and often subtle ways schools may discriminate against LGBT families. Furthermore, it illustrates how such negative interactions from school personnel and other members of the school community may negatively affect the family-school relationship among these families. Furthermore, even though the parent may have been the target of the anti-LGBT interaction, a child's exposure to the events is yet another form of a hostile climate for students with LGBT parents and may have serious consequences for their feelings of safety, their access to a quality education and their ability to learn. In fact, of the small percentage of parents who reported any occurrence

of such negative events in the past 12 months, about half (52%) reported that their child had been present.

It is important to note that although the percent of parents who experienced mistreatment from school personnel was relatively low, it was not nonexistent. About 1 in 20 parents reported having negative experiences with their child's teachers, principal or other school staff. Schools must ensure that all members of the school community are treated with respect and are free from harm—thus, even one parent in twenty experiencing mistreatment at school is too many.

Effects of Parents' Negative Experiences on Family-School Relationship

Given the importance of the family-school relationship for children's achievement, we wanted to examine whether the negative experience of LGBT parents with members of the school community had a deleterious effect on their involvement in their child's education, including involvement in school activities and communication with school personnel. Parents' experiences of mistreatment, anti-LGBT comments or negative comments about their parenting were not related to parent-school communication or parent-school involvement.⁹¹ Although negative experiences were not related to the level of involvement in the parent-teacher organization activities, they were related to parents' comfort in attending meetings of the organization. Higher frequency of mistreatment and hearing anti-LGBT comments in school were both related to decreased parental comfort attending parent-teacher organization meetings.⁹²

Frequency of parents' negative experiences was further related to their feelings of exclusion from the school community. As shown in [Figures 38a and 38b](#), parents who reported that they did not feel able to participate fully in their child's school as an LGBT parent or that they were not fully acknowledged by the school as an LGBT family were more likely to report all types of maltreatment in school in the past year.⁹³ For example, among those parents who had felt not able to participate in their child's school, over half (58%) of parents had experienced some incident of mistreatment compared to only about a quarter (26%) of other parents (see [Figure 38a](#)). We found the same relationship between negative school experiences and parents' feeling not fully acknowledged as an LGBT family at their child's school—parents who expressed having such feelings of exclusion were much more likely to report negative experiences at school, such as mistreatment or hearing negative comments about being LGBT (see [Figure 38b](#)).

Negative interactions with school staff may also hinder the relationship between the LGBT parent and school personnel. For this reason, we examined the relationship between parents' negative experiences with specific school personnel and their reported comfort level in talking to them about their family. For all three types of school personnel about whom parents were asked, the level of comfort in

Figure 38a. Negative Treatment at School and Parents' Feelings of Exclusion

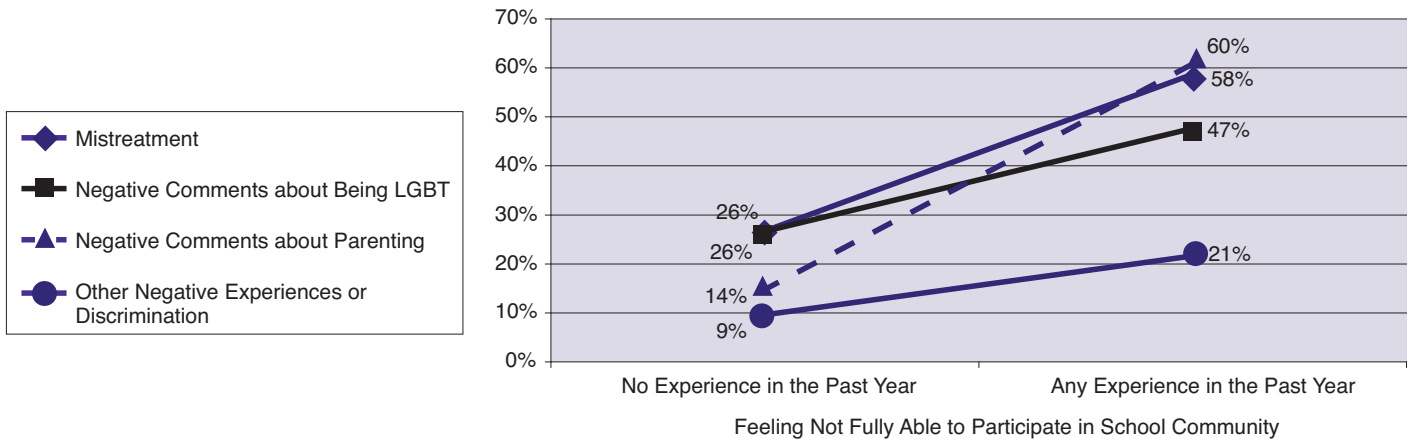
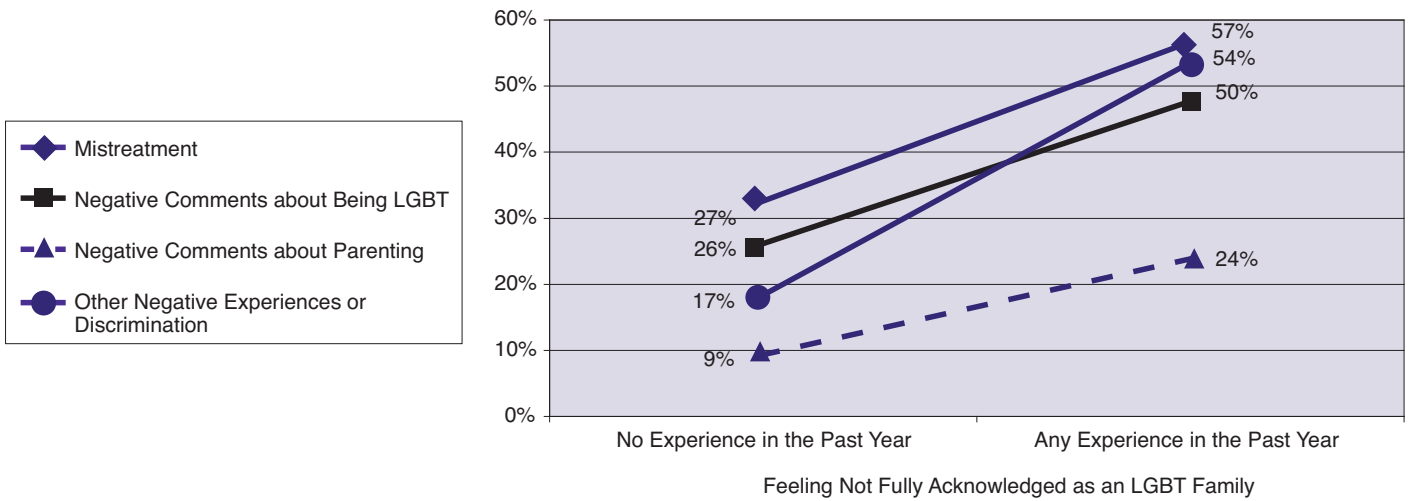
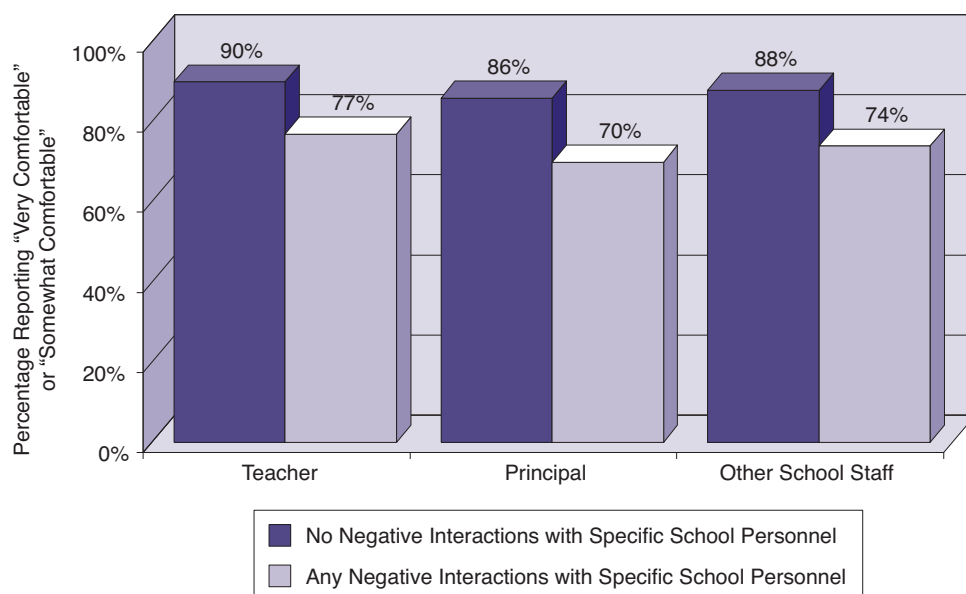


Figure 38b. Negative Treatment at School and Parents' Feelings of Exclusion



talking with the school personnel was related to whether or not the parent had had any negative interactions with them (see [Figure 39](#)).⁹⁴ For example, among parents who had never experienced any negative treatment from their child's teacher, 90% reported that they would be somewhat or very comfortable talking to their child's teacher about their family. Among parents who had had some negative incident with the teacher related to their LGBT family, a significantly lower percentage (77%) reported the same level of comfort in talking about their family.

Figure 39. Relationship Between Negative Experiences With and Comfort Talking to School Personnel about One's Family



Notes

- 91 To examine the relationship of parents' negative experiences and parent-school communication and involvement, we examined bivariate correlations between these reported activities and the overall level of mistreatment, hearing anti-LGBT comments and hearing negative comments about parenting using the computed average across the five types of school community members (i.e., teacher, principal, other school staff, students and parents). Because of the large number of correlations, both a conservative error term was used ($p < .001$) and the magnitude of the relationship was considered (small/moderate effect of $r = .2$ or greater).
- 92 Mistreatment, $r = -.29$; Negative comments, $r = -.23$, $p < .001$ for both.
- 93 The graphics represent a correlational relationship. The correlation coefficients between "not fully able to participate" and negative experiences were: Mistreatment, $r = .45$; Negative Comments, $r = .30$; Negative Parenting Comments, $r = .17$, and Other Negative Experiences, $r = .56$. For "not fully acknowledged," the correlation coefficients were: Mistreatment, $r = .48$; Negative Comments, $r = .34$; Negative Parenting Comments, $r = .25$, and Other Negative Experiences, $r = .49$. All significant at $p < .001$.
- 94 To examine the relationship of parents' negative experiences with school personnel and comfort speaking to the same school personnel about their family, we computed a dichotomous variable for each school personnel type where 0 indicated no negative experience and 1 indicated any of the three types of negative experience (mistreatment, negative comments about being LGBT and negative comments about parenting) within each type of school personnel (teacher, principal and other school personnel). We used a dichotomous indicator because the variance among the negative experiences variables for school personnel was so low. We then performed a series of chi-square analyses, negative experiences x comfort. for teachers, $\chi^2 = 10.1$, $\phi = .13$, $p < .001$; for principals, $\chi^2 = 13.6$, $\phi = .15$, $p < .001$, and for other school staff, $\chi^2 = 12.9$, $\phi = .15$, $p < .001$.



Inclusivity of LGBT Issues in School and Other School Supports

GLSEN's research related to the school experiences of LGBT students indicates that few schools have positive LGBT resources, such as inclusive curricula or a safe school policy that includes specific protections based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity.⁹⁵ For students with LGBT parents, this lack of supportive resources may also negatively affect their school experience. Furthermore, LGBT families may be invisible in representations of family life. If an elementary school library does not include books that represent different types of families, including LGBT families, then those students with LGBT parents may feel excluded or that their family is somehow strange. If a school record only allows for "mother's name and father's name," LGBT parents may feel that they are not accepted into the school community as non-LGBT parents would be. We asked parents how inclusive overall was their child's school of LGBT families and of other kinds of families that are often considered "nontraditional," such as a single-parent headed family. About two-thirds of the parents thought that the school was somewhat or very inclusive of LGBT families (68%), yet a higher percentage (85%) thought that the school was inclusive of other kinds of families (see [Figure 40](#)). Elementary school parents were more likely to believe that the school was inclusive on both indicators than other parents, although the difference was more striking regarding inclusivity of LGBT families (see [Figure 41](#)).⁹⁶ Parents whose child attended a non-religious private school were also more likely to rate the school as more inclusive (see also [Figure 41](#)).⁹⁷ Specifically, these private school parents were higher

Figure 40. Parents' Reports on Inclusivity of Their Child's School: LGBT and Other "Nontraditional" Families

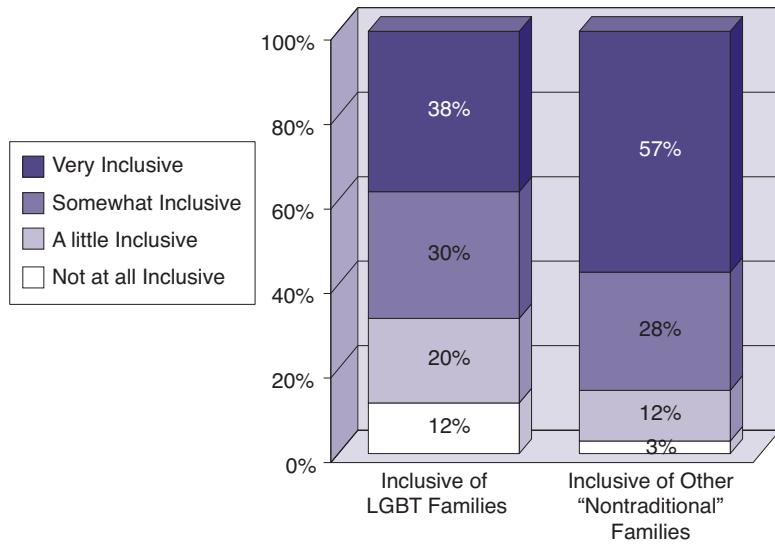
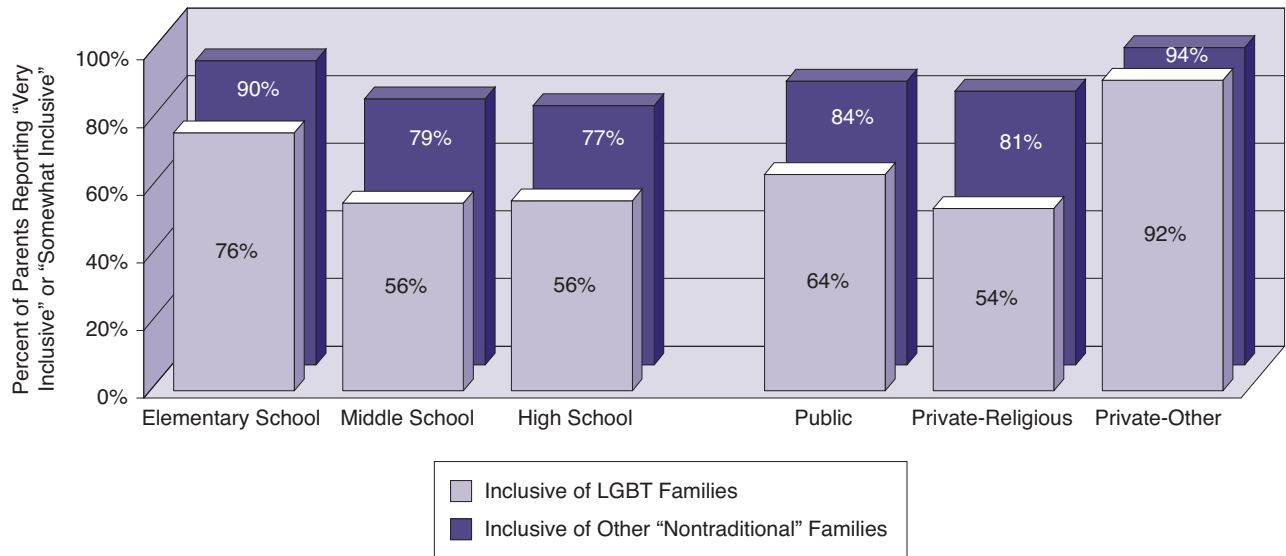


Figure 41. Parents' Reports on Inclusivity of Their Child's School by School Characteristics



than all other parents in their ratings on inclusion of LGBT families and were higher than elementary school parents on inclusivity of other nontraditional families.

Access to Information About LGBT Families and Other LGBT-Related Topics

Many advocates of multicultural education, such as the National Association of Multicultural Education, believe that an inclusive curriculum promotes equity for all students, regardless of culture, race/ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation and that it enables the individual to believe in one's own intrinsic worth and in one's own culture.⁹⁸ Thus, GLSEN advocates that curricula and other school-based resources that provide positive representations of LGBT people, history and events are important indicators of school climate and positively affect students' experiences at school.

Students and parents were asked about the presence of LGBT-inclusive curricula and resources in their school. Less than a third of both students (27%) and parents (29%) reported that the school curriculum included representations of LGBT people, history or events in the past school year. Among students who had been taught about LGBT-related topics in a class, History/Social Studies, English and Health were the classes most often mentioned as being inclusive of LGBT topics (see [Table 23](#)). Many of these students also mentioned other classes, such as Psychology, Sex Education, Media, and Religious Studies, which were not categories explicitly listed on the survey. Among students who said that LGBT-related topics were included in their classroom curricula, 77% thought that these were represented in a somewhat or very positive manner (see [Figure 42](#)), which translates into less than a quarter (21%) of all students in our survey reporting that positive representations of LGBT people, history or events were included in their classroom activities.

Students were also specifically asked if representations of LGBT families were included in classroom activities when the topic of family entered into the curriculum. Less than a third (30%) of all students said that representations of LGBT families were included in the curriculum when the topic of families came up during class activities (see [Figure 43](#)). Students in the Northeast and the West were far more likely to report that representations of families with LGBT parents were included in their class activities or curriculum. More than a third (37%) of students in the West and 40% in the Northeast said that representations of LGBT families were included in classroom activities, compared to less than a fifth of students in the Midwest (14%) and South (13%).⁹⁹

With regard to parents' perspectives, the prevalence of an inclusive curriculum varied by the type of school. As shown in [Figure 44](#), high school parents were much more likely than middle school and elementary school parents to report that their child's curriculum was inclusive of LGBT issues (44% v. 28% and 24%, respectively).¹⁰⁰

Table 23. Most Commonly Reported Subject Areas in which LGBT Issues are Included

Student Reports

(percent of those reporting any LGBT inclusion)

Grade Level	Subject Area	Percent of Students
Middle School (Grades 6–8)	Other Classes	50%
	Health Education	44%
	History/Social Studies	25%
	Science; English	19%
High School (Grades 9–12)	History/Social Studies	50%
	English	46%
	Health Education	42%
	Other Classes	25%

Parental Reports

(percent of those reporting any LGBT inclusion)

Grade Level	Subject Area	Percent of Students
Elementary School	Family-Related Curriculum	61%
	History	34%
	Reading/Language Arts/English	19%
Middle School	Family-Related Curriculum	30%
	History	30%
	Health	22%
High School	Health	90%
	History	24%
	English	22%

The nature of the curricular inclusion also varied somewhat by the school level. As also shown in [Table 23](#), parents of high school students were most likely to report History, Health and English as subjects in which LGBT issues were discussed, similar to results from the student survey. Parents of elementary and middle school students, however, were also likely to report inclusion in family-related curriculum.

As with other resources, parents with a child at a non-religious private school were also more likely to report LGBT-inclusive material in school than other parents (see [Figure 45](#))—half of these parents (51%) compared to about a quarter of other parents (25% and 28%, respectively).¹⁰¹

Supportive Student Clubs

Existing research has shown that the presence of Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) and other types of student clubs that address LGBT student issues may have a positive impact on school climate and the experiences of LGBT students.¹⁰² Student clubs that provide support to LGBT students may also be a resource and source of support for students from LGBT families. For example, these types of clubs may provide a space in which students with LGBT parents can talk openly about their experience, regardless of their own sexual orientation or gender identity. Thus, students were asked about the presence of supportive student clubs at their school. Only about a third (34%) said that their school had a GSA or other kind of student club that addressed LGBT student issues. Students in high school were much more likely to report that their school had a GSA or other supportive student club than students in middle school (48% vs. 15%).¹⁰³ In addition, students with LGBT parents were more likely than the general population of students to report that their school had a student club that addresses LGBT issues (34% vs. 22%).¹⁰⁴

Supportive Members of the School Community

For any student, having a supportive adult at school can have great benefits for the student's academic experience. For students with LGBT parents, supportive teachers or staff may be even more important, particularly if she or he receives negative reactions from other members of the school community because of her or his family. The vast majority (87%) of students reported that they had at least one teacher or other school staff member who was supportive of LGBT issues, such as students with LGBT parents and more than half (55%) said they had six or more supportive school staff people. Furthermore, about half (51%) could identify at least one school staff person who was open about being lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender.

Students were also asked several questions about their comfort level with regard to being open about their family or having an LGBT parent. [Figure 46](#) illustrates the level of comfort students reported with various members of the school community: teacher(s), principal, counselor or psychologist, nurse, librarian, close friends and other

classmates. The vast majority of students reported feeling somewhat or very comfortable talking with close friends about their family (82%) yet only about half reported being comfortable talking with other classmates (52%). Among the adult members of the school community, about two-thirds reported that they would be comfortable talking to a teacher or their school counselor or psychologist (65% and 62%, respectively).

Students were also asked how comfortable they would be with other interactions between their family and members of the school community: inviting friends home, inviting friends to spend time with their family, introducing their parents to the parents of their friends and having their parents attending school events. Overall, as shown in [Figure 47](#), students reported being comfortable with these other family-school intersections.

Given the importance of the family-school relationship for student academic success, it was also important to examine whether the LGBT parents in our survey believed that teachers in their child's school were supportive of LGBT issues. Two-thirds (67%) of parents reported that there were supportive teachers (at least a few) at their child's school and a third (33%) reported that most or all of the teachers were supportive of LGBT issues. Elementary school parents reported, on average, a greater number of supportive teachers than middle and high school parents, and parents of children attending non-religious private schools also reported more supportive teachers (see [Figure 48](#)).¹⁰⁵

Parents differed in their reports of supportive teachers based on the region and locale in which they lived. As shown in [Figure 49](#), parents from the South reported fewer supportive teachers than parents for other regions.¹⁰⁶ Parents from urban schools identified more supportive teachers than parents from suburban and small town/rural schools (see also [Figure 49](#)).¹⁰⁷

Safe School Policies

Having a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment in school is an important tool for making schools safer for all students. When such policies or procedures exist and are enforced, schools send a message to the student population that victimizing behaviors will not be tolerated. Comprehensive safe school policies that enumerate categories of protections, such as sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, may provide students with greater protection against bullying and harassment in that they offer explicit protections. Although almost three-quarters (73%) of students reported that their school had some type of policy for dealing with incidents of harassment and assault, far fewer reported that their school's policy explicitly mentioned sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression (see [Table 24](#)).

Although safe school policies would have the most direct benefit for the student population, it is also important for all parents to know what type of safe school policy their child's school has as it provides parents with an understanding of the level of protection that their child is afforded in school. Also, in the event of their child being bullied or harassed in school, knowledge of the school's policy may also provide parents with the foundation for addressing the problem with school personnel. In addition, for LGBT parents, whether or not a school's policy includes sexual orientation or gender identity/expression may be an additional indicator of how welcoming the school is of their type of family, as well as an additional level of protection for their child if she or he is harassed because of having LGBT parents. As shown in [Table 25](#), whereas three-quarters of LGBT parents reported that their child's school had some type of safe school policy, less than half of parents (42%) reported that the policy specifically included language about sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression. Although there were no significant differences across school level with regard to safe school policies, there were significant differences across school type. Parents whose children attended a non-religious private school were much more likely than other parents to report that the school had a comprehensive policy—nearly two-thirds (63%) compared to about a third for both public school parents and religious school parents (38% and 33%, respectively).¹⁰⁸

Other School Supports

Parents and students were also asked about other types of school activities or characteristics that may be supportive for LGBT families. Having other LGBT people who are part of the school community may provide a greater sense of attachment to the school and may be a resource for some LGBT parents. As shown in [Figure 44](#), over half (61%) of the parents in the survey reported that there were other LGBT families who were part of the school and nearly half (47%) reported that there were teachers who openly identified as LGBT. Although parents' knowledge of other LGBT people at school did not vary across elementary, middle and high schools, it did differ across type of school. Parents with a child in a non-religious private school were much more likely than other parents to report that there were other LGBT families in the school community and that there were LGBT school personnel (see [Figure 45](#)).¹⁰⁹

Another consideration for LGBT parents in assessing their child's school climate would be whether school personnel had had any training on LGBT issues.¹¹⁰ Overall, few parents (10%) reported being aware of such trainings (see also [Figures 44 and 45](#)) and this low percentage was consistent across school levels. However, with regard to school type, the percentage of public school parents reporting such trainings was lower than private school parents (both religious and other).¹¹¹

With regard to student reports, few students reported having access to LGBT-inclusive resources at their school. Less than a fifth (14%) reported that LGBT-related topics were included in any of their textbooks, and only a little more than a quarter (29%) said that their school library contained materials that included LGBT-related topics. Furthermore, less than half (45%) of students said that they were able to use school computers to access websites about LGBT-related information. Students were more likely to report that they had supports in the form of other students with LGBT parents. More than half (58%) of students in our survey reported knowing at least one other student at their school who had an LGBT parent or parents. Outside of school, almost two-thirds (62%) had at least one friend with an LGBT parent and 15% had more than 10 friends with an LGBT parent.

Figure 42. Students' Reports on Quality of Representations of LGBT-Related Issues in Class

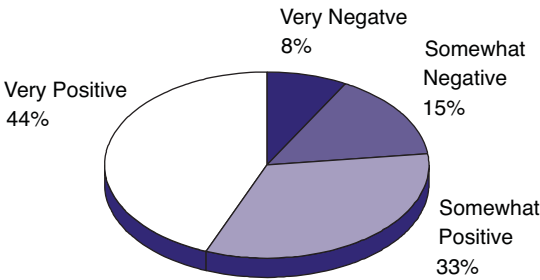


Figure 43. Students' Reports on Representation of LGBT Families in Family-Related Curriculum

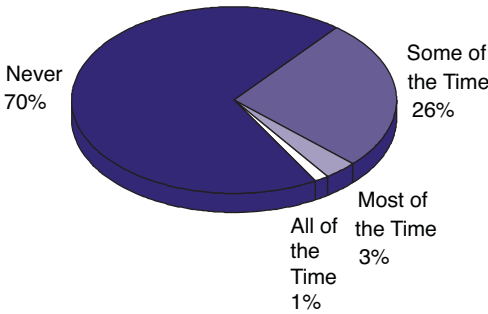


Figure 44. Parents' Reports of Other LGBT-Related Resources in School by School Level

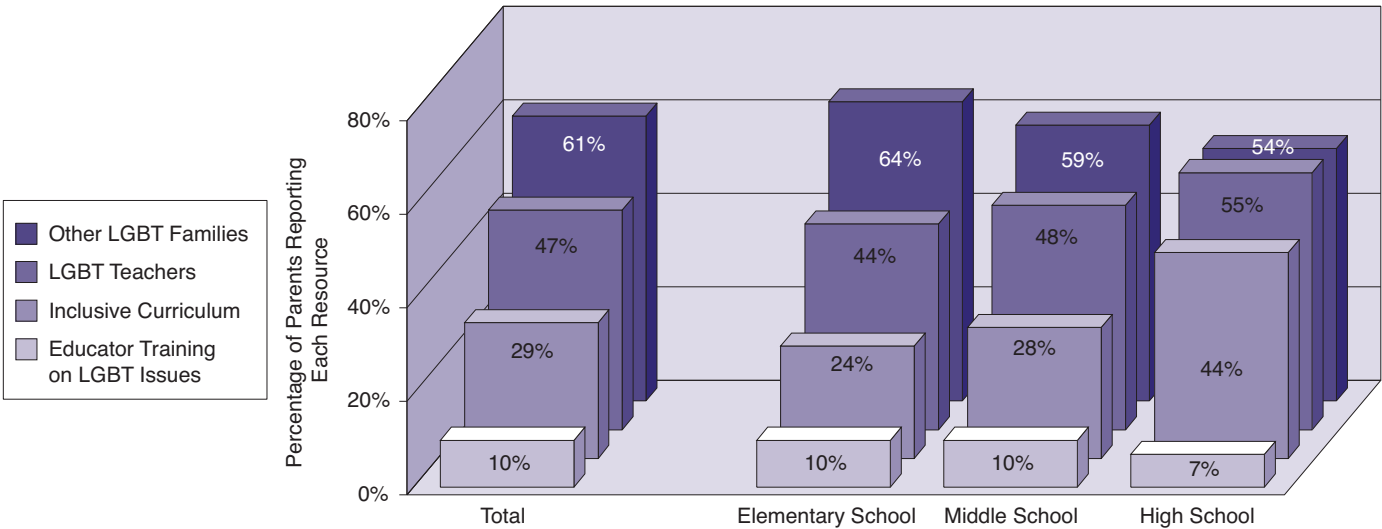


Figure 45. Parents' Reports of Other LGBT-Related Resources in School by School Type

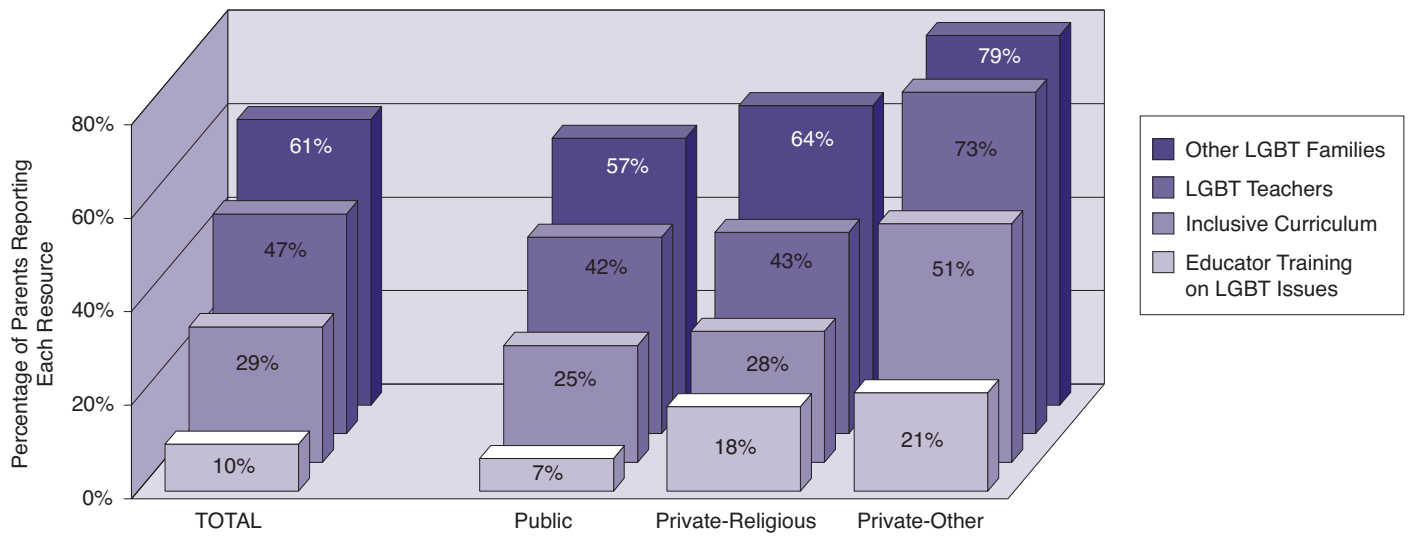


Figure 46. Percentage of Students Who Were "Somewhat" or "Very Comfortable" Talking with School Community Members About Their LGBT Parents or Family

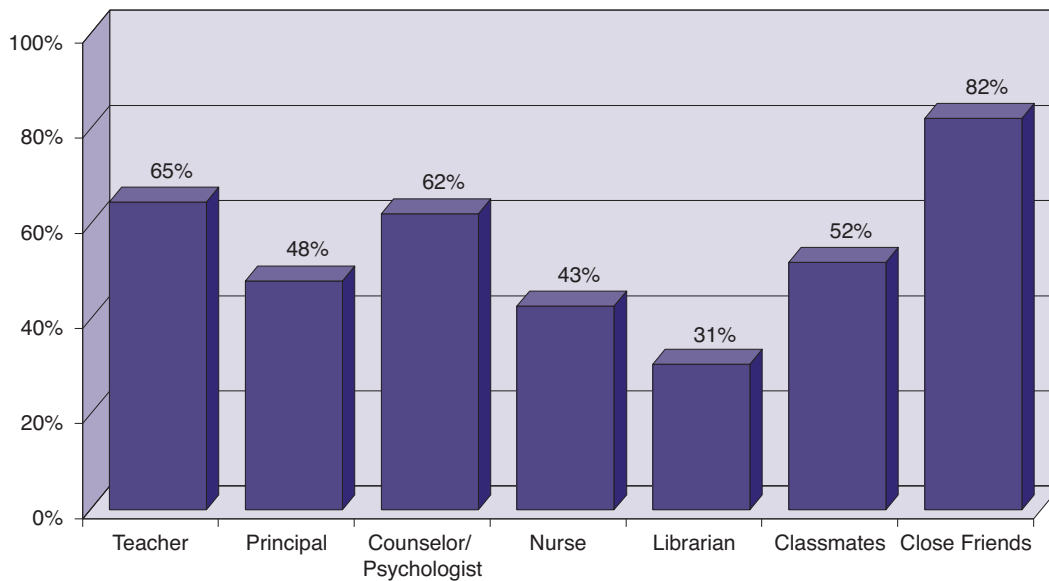


Figure 47. Percentage of Students Who Were "Somewhat" or "Very Comfortable" re: Various School and Home Activities

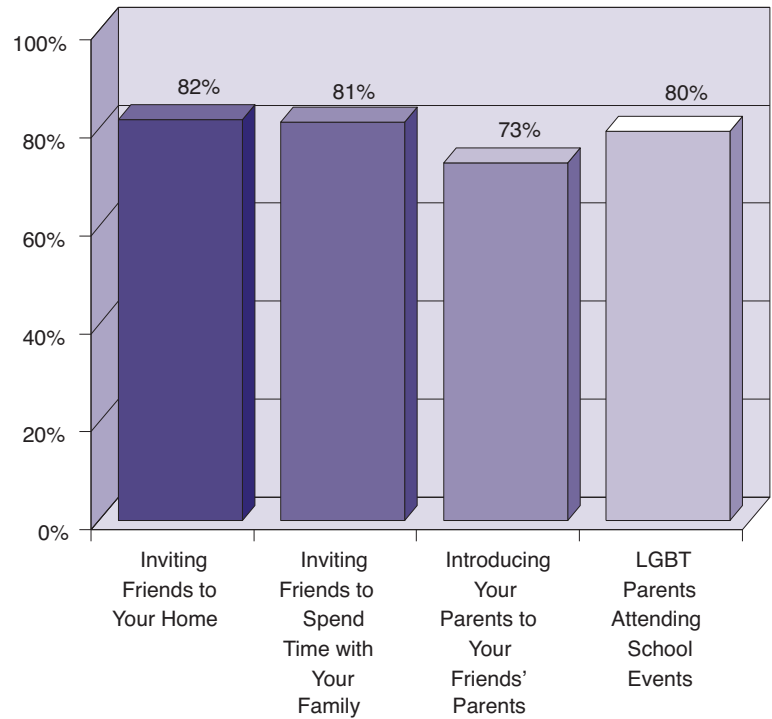


Figure 48. Parents' Report on Teachers Supportive of LGBT Issues by Characteristics

How many teachers or other school staff do you know who are supportive of LGBT issues?

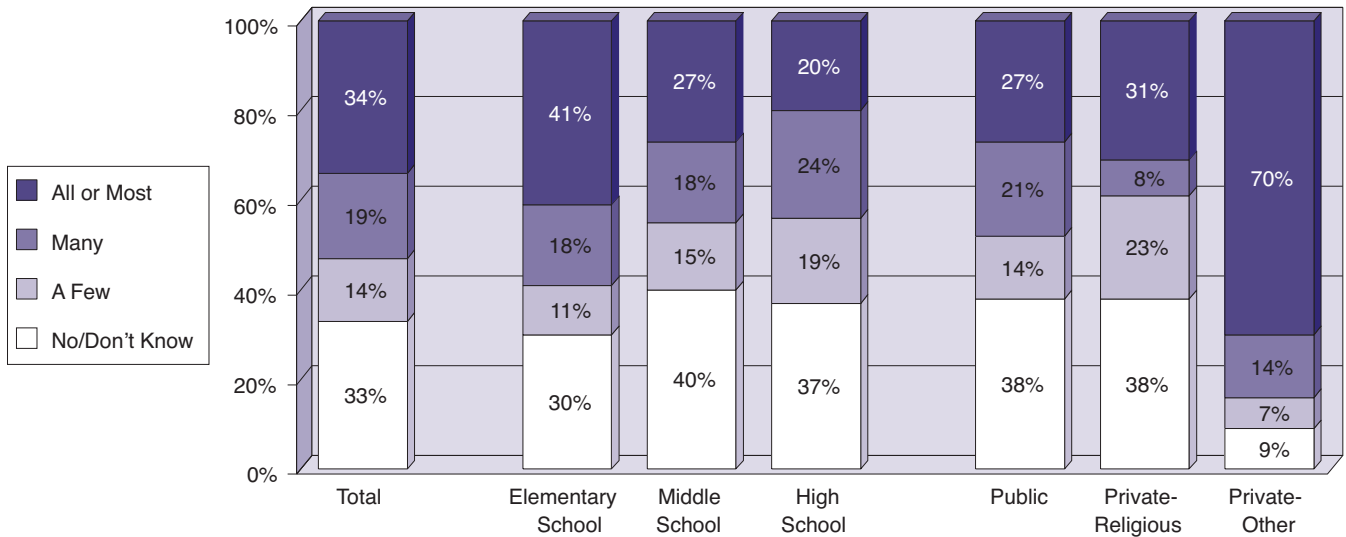


Figure 49. Parents' Report on Teachers Supportive of LGBT Issues by Locale and Region

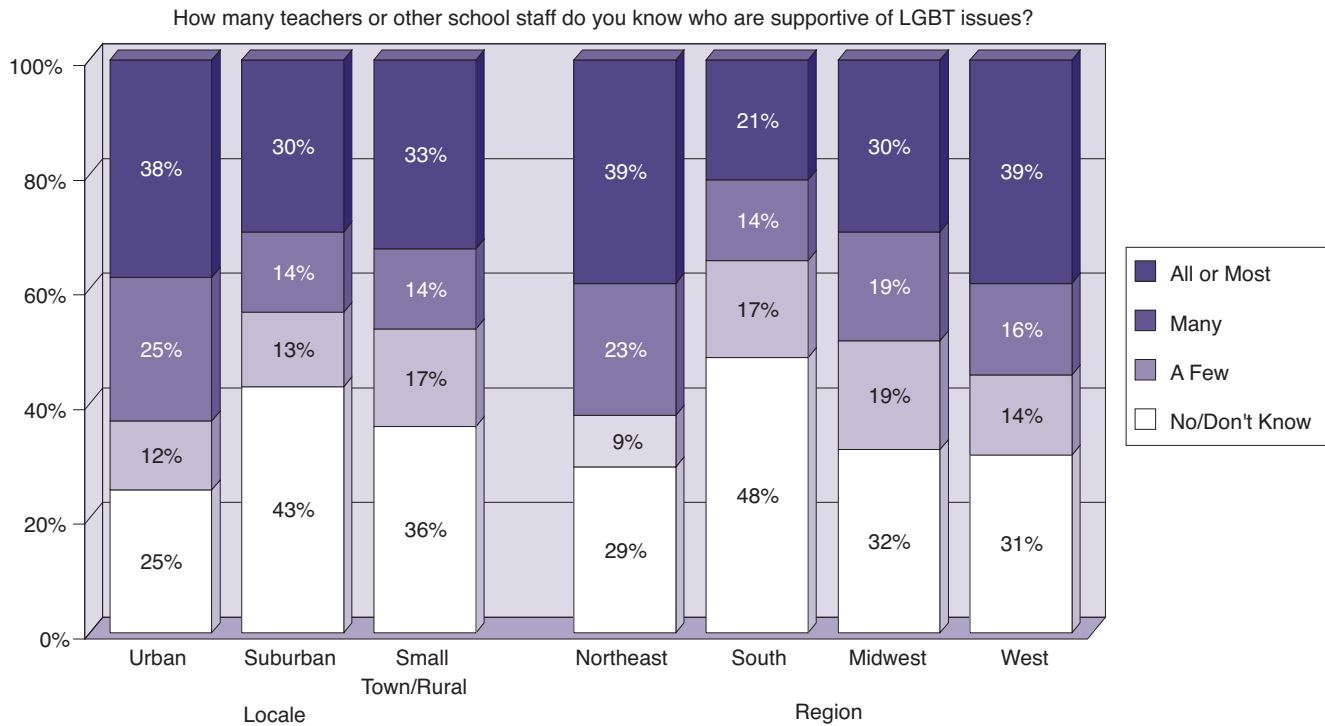


Table 24. Students' Reports Regarding Safe School Policies

	Total
No Policy ^a	27%
Any Policy	73%
Comprehensive Policy	35%
Generic Policy ^b	38%

^a Includes those students who indicated they did not know if there was a policy or not.

^b Includes those students who indicated they did not know if the policy included specific enumeration.

Table 25. Parents' Reports Regarding Safe School Policies by School Type

	Total	Public	Private-Religious	Private-Other
No Policy ^a	25%	26%	23%	21%
Any Policy	75%	74%	77%	79%
Comprehensive Policy	42%	38%	33%	63%
Generic Policy ^b	33%	36%	44%	13%

^a Includes those parents who indicated they did not know if there was a policy or not.

^b Includes those parents who indicated they did not know if the policy included specific enumeration.

Utility of School Resources and Supports

In addition to documenting whether or not schools have institutional supports for LGBT families, such as supportive faculty, inclusive curricula, or Gay-Straight Alliances, it is also important to examine how such institutional supports may benefit LGBT parents and their children.

Even though most parents have a more limited day-to-day relationship with their child's school, the quality of the family-school relationship could be affected by the nature of LGBT-related resources and supports, particularly educator trainings regarding LGBT issues and comprehensive safe school policies.

Supportive Educators. The presence of school staff who were supportive of students with LGBT parents was related to students' academic achievement. As shown in Figure 50, as the number of supportive school staff increased, students' reported grade point averages (GPAs) also increased.¹¹² For example, students who could identify many (six or more) supportive staff at their school reported a GPA half a grade higher than students with no supportive school staff (3.4 versus 2.9).

A greater number of supportive educators was also related to fewer missed days of school due to safety concerns.¹¹³ For example, almost a fifth (16%) of students who said they had no supportive staff reported missing school because they felt unsafe, compared to 10% of those who had many supportive staff at their school.

Given the relationships between the presence of supportive educators and student's academic achievement and sense of safety, it is important for schools to provide training for educators about LGBT-related issues, including how to provide appropriate support to students with LGBT parents. Such training may foster a more positive school climate for LGBT parents as well as students.

Figure 50. Student Achievement and Supportive School Staff

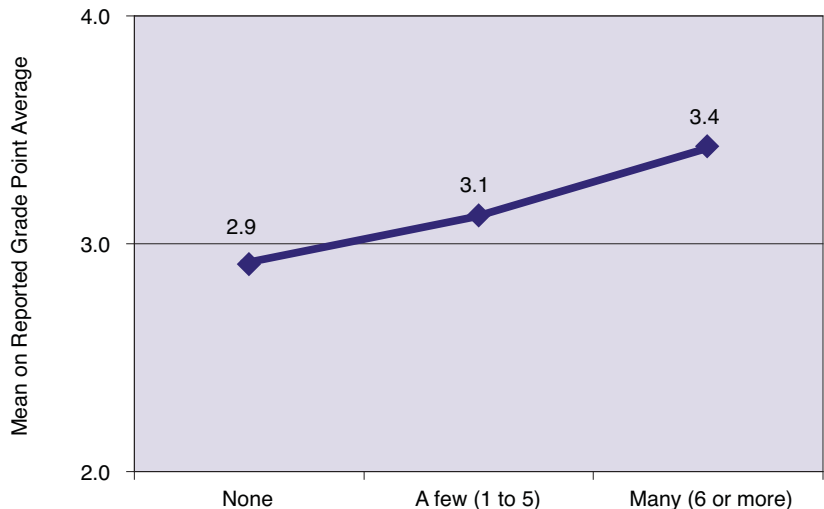
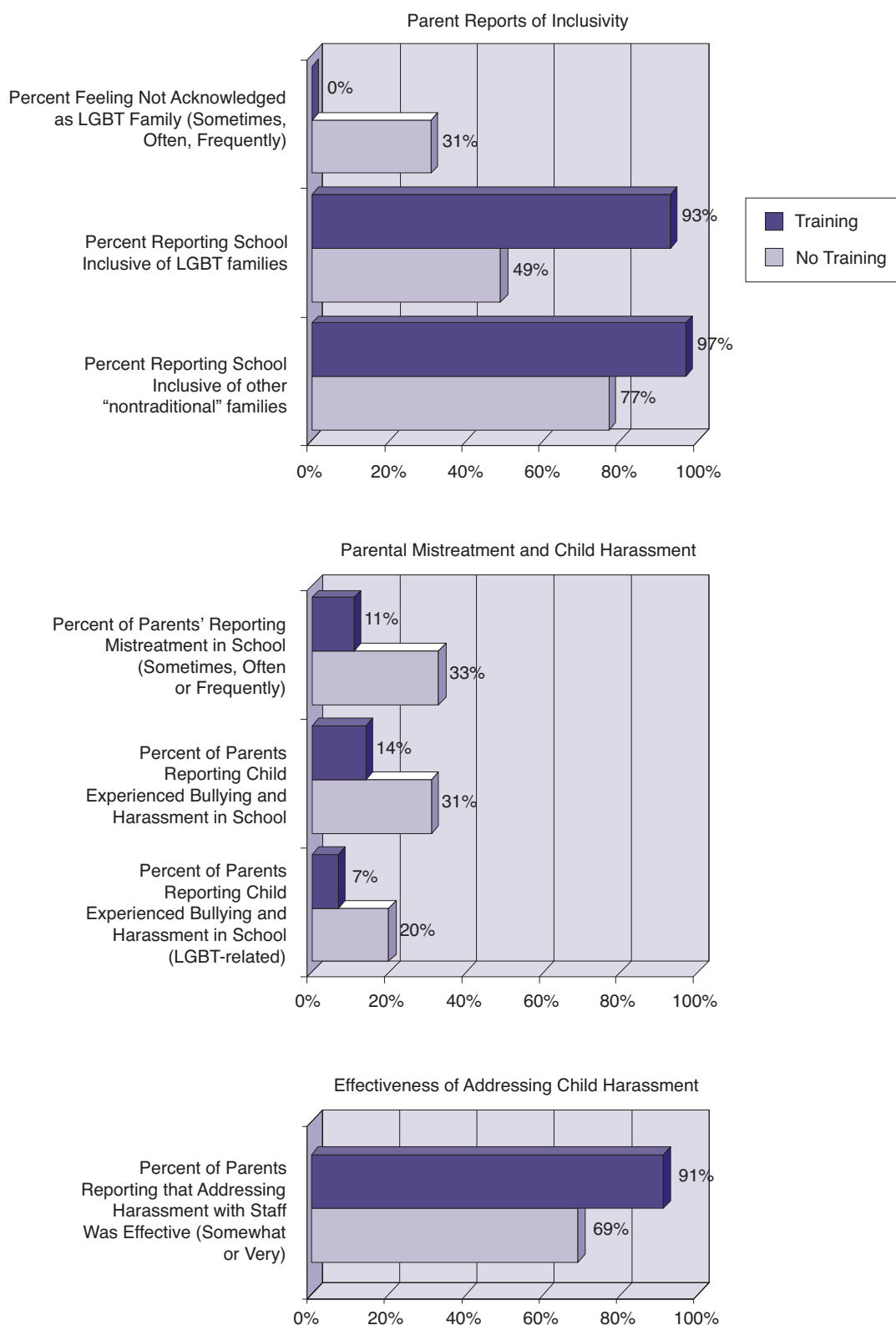


Figure 51. Parents' Reports of LGBT-Related Educator Trainings in School and Indicators of School Climate



Even though the minority of parents reported that their child's school had training related to LGBT issues, there were significant relationships between trainings and various aspects of school climate. Parents who reported that the school had such training were less likely to report that they were not acknowledged by the school as LGBT families and more likely to rate the school as inclusive of LGBT families as well as inclusive of other "nontraditional" families (see [Figure 51](#)).¹¹⁴ With regard to harassment or mistreatment, these parents were also less likely to report that they themselves had experienced mistreatment in school related to being LGBT and less likely to report that their child had told them about being bullied or harassed in school (see also [Figure 51](#)).¹¹⁵

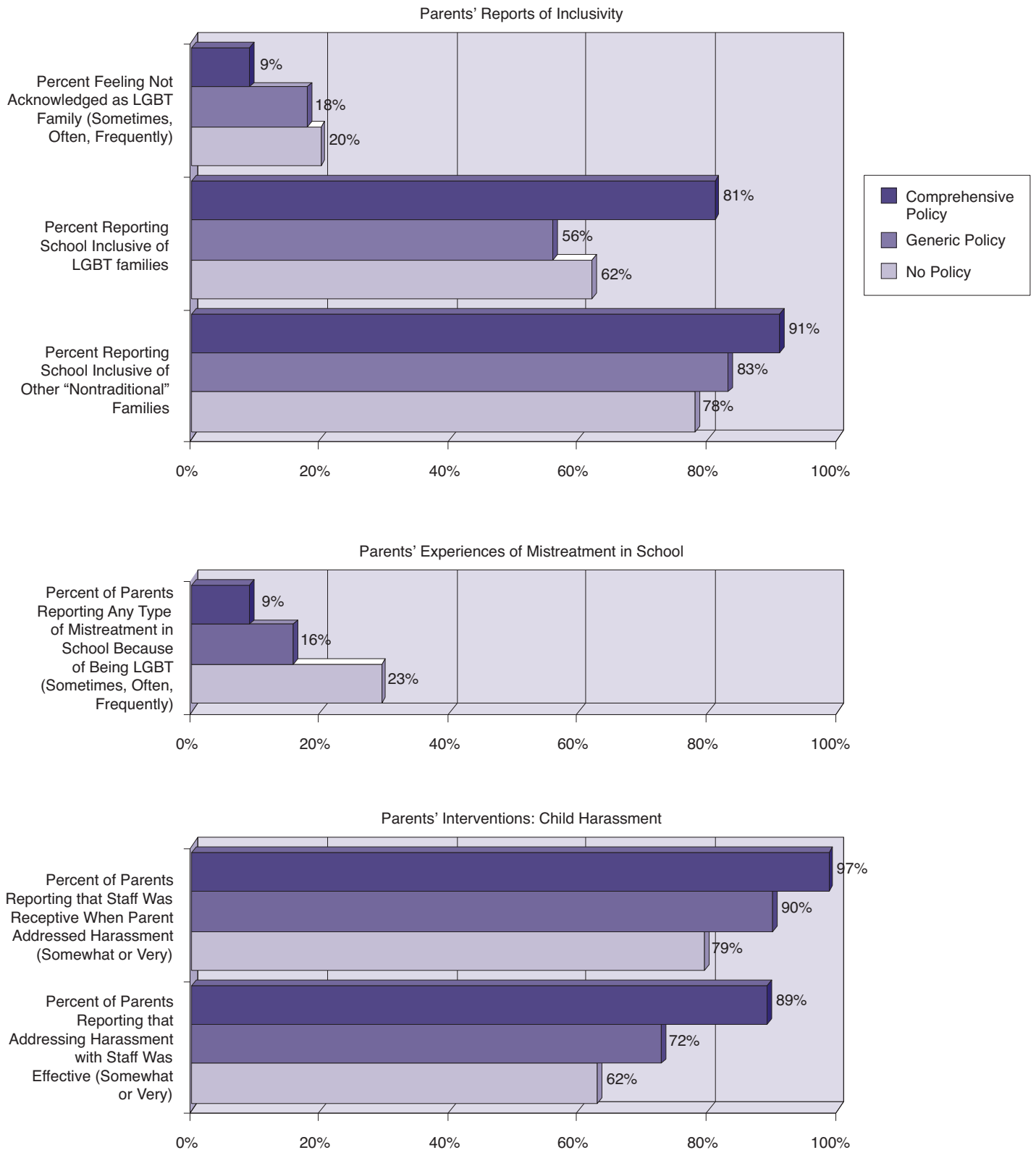
For parents who reported their child had been bullied or harassed in school, whether or not the school had had LGBT-related training was not related to the frequency with which parents addressed the problem with school staff. However, those parents who reported that the school had had training were more likely to report that addressing the problem with school personnel was indeed effective (see also [Figure 51](#)).¹¹⁶

It is possible that the parents in this study may have made an assumption that school personnel had had training related to LGBT issues as a result of their more positive experiences with the school. However, these results regarding educator trainings may be an indication that such trainings have a positive effect on how school personnel address LGBT issues in school. Future research is needed to understand the effect of educator trainings on school climate for LGBT parents and their children.

Safe School Policies. Parents' ratings on their school's inclusivity varied by the type of safe school policy the school reportedly had (see [Figure 52](#)). Parents from schools with comprehensive policies were least likely to feel unacknowledged as an LGBT family and most likely to rate the school as more inclusive not only of LGBT families but of other types of "nontraditional" families as well.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, there was no evidence that having a generic policy was any different than having no policy whatsoever. Parents from schools with comprehensive policies were also less likely to report that they themselves had experienced mistreatment in school related to being LGBT.¹¹⁸ Overall, parents whose child's school had a comprehensive safe school policy reported the lowest level of mistreatment and there were no differences between the no-policy and generic-policy groups (see also [Figure 52](#)).

There were no significant differences by school policy with regard to parents' reports of child harassment in school. Also, among parents whose children had been harassed, there were no differences in the frequency with which they talked to the school about the harassment. However, school policy appeared to make a difference in how parents felt the school handled issues related to child harassment. As also shown in [Figure 52](#), parents from schools with comprehensive

Figure 52. Parents' Reports of Safe School Policy and Indicators of School Climate



policies reported school personnel as most receptive to them when they addressed the issue of their child being harassed in school, followed by parents from schools with a generic policy.¹¹⁹ Parents from schools with a comprehensive policy were also most likely to report that addressing child harassment with staff was effective.¹²⁰ Furthermore, there were no differences between the no-policy and generic-policy groups in effectiveness. Thus, although the presence of a comprehensive policy may not necessarily influence whether or not a parent decides to speak with school officials about their child's experiences of harassment, its existence may affect how school officials address the concerns of the LGBT parents who do bring the issue to their attention.

Although there were few significant differences in students' reports of school climate by type of school policy, there was a general trend in the data that students in schools with a comprehensive safe school policy reported fewer negative experiences in school. For example, [Figure 53](#) illustrates that students in schools with comprehensive policies typically reported a lower incidence of mistreatment than students in schools with a generic policy or no policy at all. The difference was, in fact, significant for mistreatment by teachers—students in schools with comprehensive policies were less likely than other students to report mistreatment by a teacher.¹²¹

State Safe School Legislation. A growing number of states across the country have added explicit protections for LGBT students in their state education anti-discrimination and harassment statutes. As with school-level policies, whereas such laws perhaps have primary importance for protecting students from bullying and harassment, they may also afford protection to the children of LGBT parents with regard to harassment related to their actual or perceived sexual orientation and harassment related to their family constellation. Currently, ten states plus the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation in schools and four of these states also include protections on the basis of gender identity.¹²² Ten states currently have statewide “anti-bullying” laws that do not explicitly define “bullying” or list categories of students who should be protected from specific and prevalent forms of bullying.¹²³ Many safe school advocates believe that general anti-bullying laws are insufficient in protecting students from harassment and discrimination in schools because they are too vague and do not provide teachers and administrators with clear legal guidance. Proponents of general bullying laws often argue that enumerated categories do not necessarily provide stronger protection and are not necessary for protective safe school legislation.

Given there were significant differences in LGBT parents' reports of school climate regarding the type of school-level safe school policy, it is important to examine school climate for LGBT families and state-level safe school legislation.¹²⁴ With regard to students' experiences in school, the existence of comprehensive safe school legislation was

Figure 53. Safe School Policies and Students' Experiences of Mistreatment in School

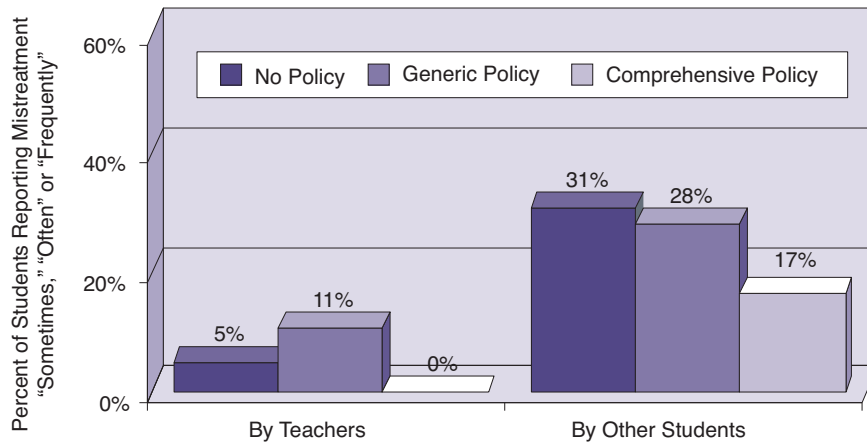


Figure 54. State Safe School Legislation and Students' Reports of Biased Remarks

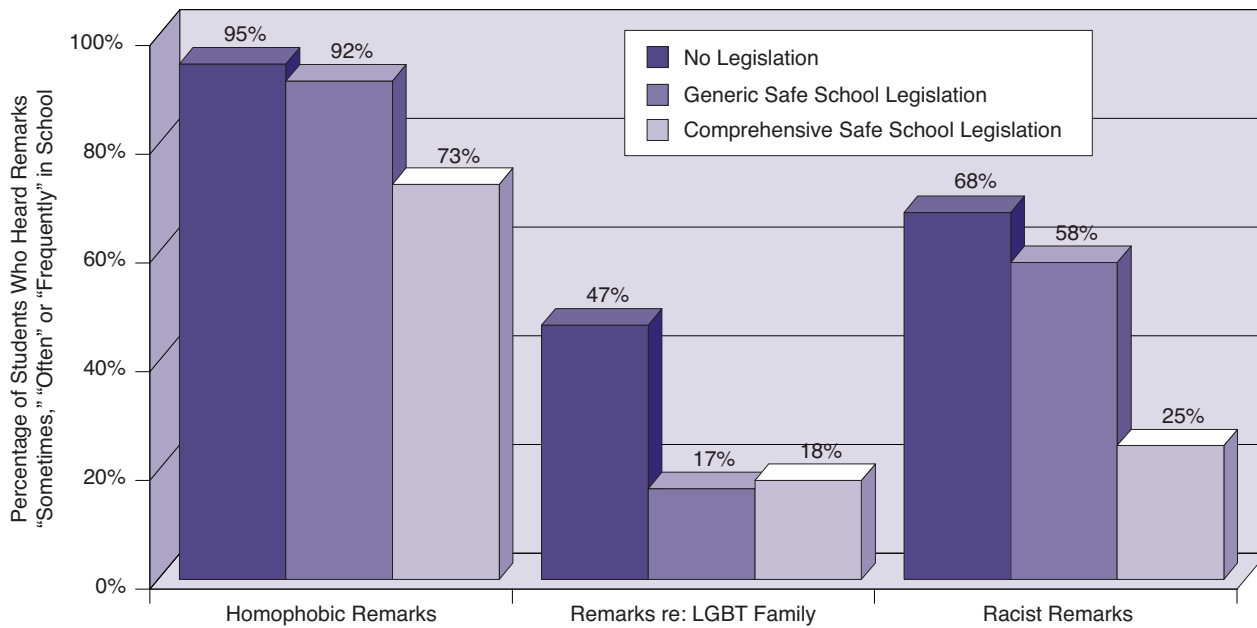
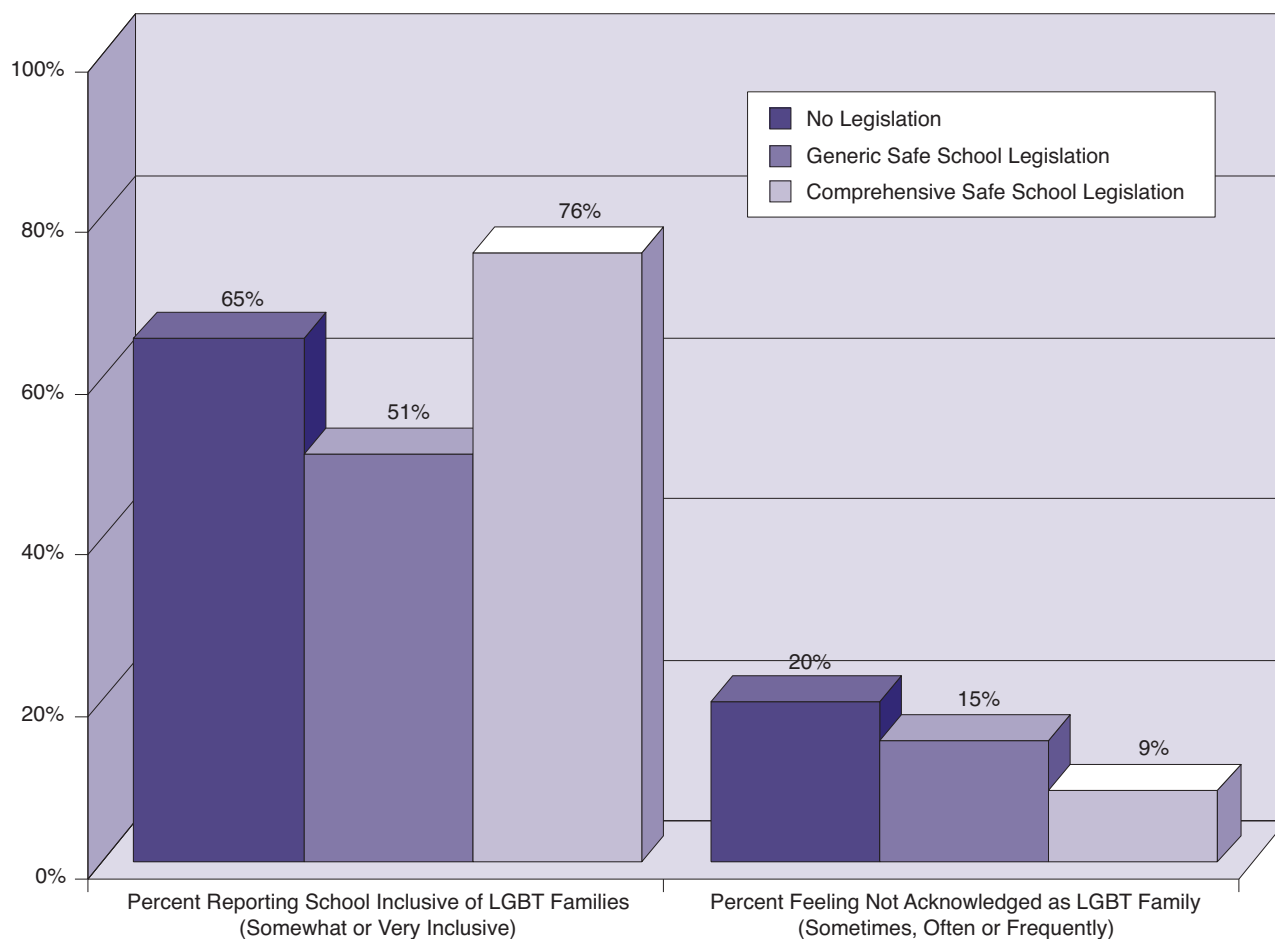


Figure 55. State Safe School Legislation and Indicators of School Climate for LGBT Parents



related to their reports of hearing certain types of biased language in school. As shown in Figure 54, students in states with comprehensive legislation were less likely to report hearing high frequencies of homophobic remarks and racist remarks than all other students. With regard to remarks about having LGBT parents, however, students from states with no safe school legislation were significantly higher than students from states with any type of safe school law and there were no differences between those from states with generic laws and those from states with comprehensive laws.¹²⁵

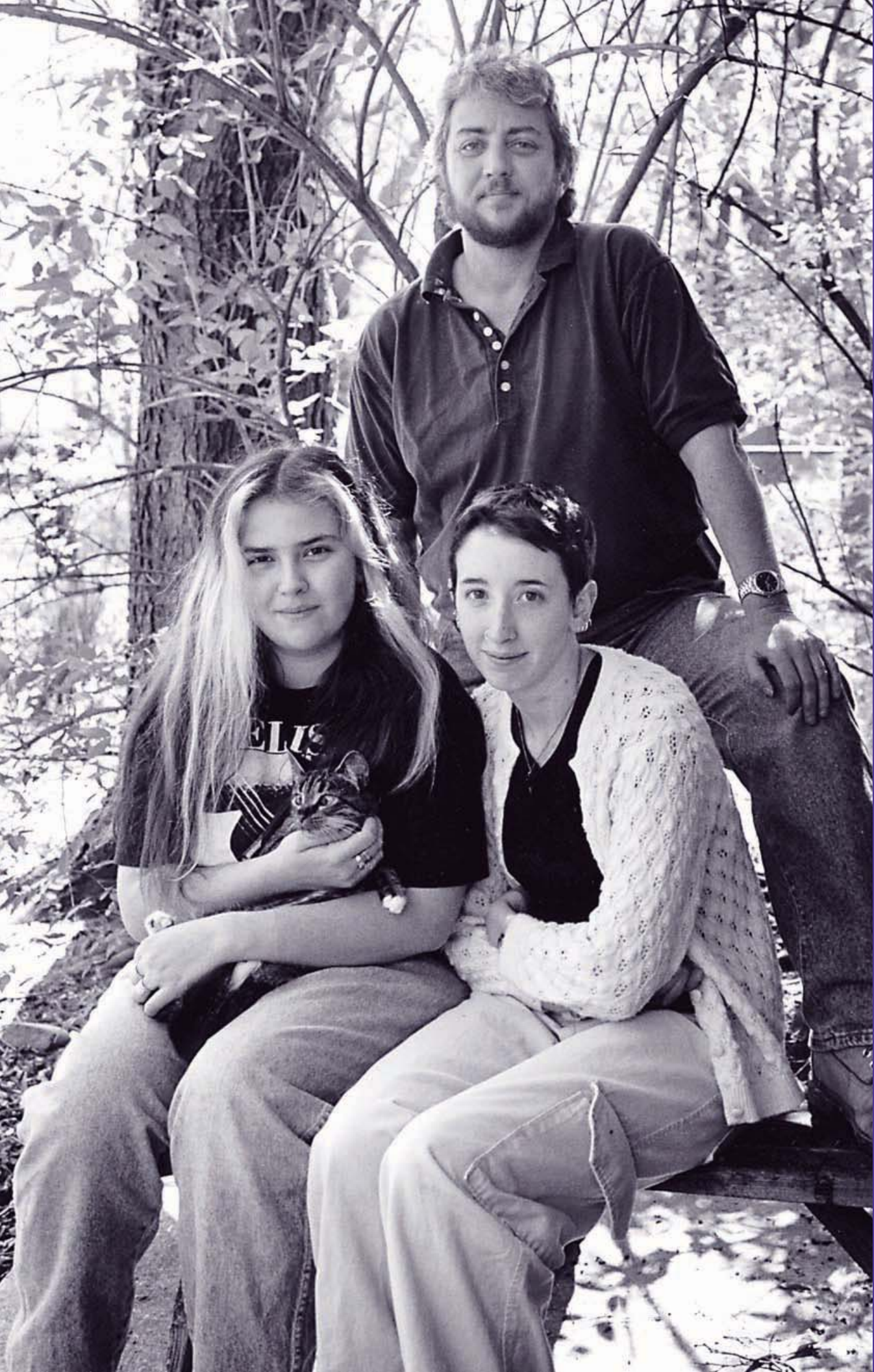
With regard to parents' reports on school climate, although there were no significant differences across state legislations groups with regard to parental mistreatment and child harassment, there were differences in parental reports on school inclusivity.¹²⁶ Parents from states with comprehensive legislation were least likely to report not feeling acknowledged by the school community as an LGBT family and were most likely to report that the school was inclusive of LGBT families (see Figure 55). Furthermore, there is no evidence that generic safe school legislation has any benefits over having no

legislation on these indicators of climate. Although there may be many contributing factors that might result in differences across states by type of safe school legislation, these findings nevertheless lend evidence to the claim that comprehensive safe school laws may be more effective than generic laws or no law at all in creating safer schools for LGBT students and families.

Notes

- 95 See Kosciw, J. & Diaz, E. (2006). *The 2005 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
- 96 Percentages shown in the Figure are for illustrative purposes. Because the two inclusivity variables were highly correlated, differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace=.07, $F(4,1118)=10.6$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 97 Percentages shown in the Figure are for illustrative purposes. Because the two inclusivity variables were highly correlated, differences between groups were tested by a multivariate analysis of variance. The multivariate effect was significant, Pillai's trace=.09, $F(4,1120)=13.4$, $p<.001$. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 98 To learn more about the National Association of Multicultural Education, go to: <http://www.nameorg.org/resources/FAQs.htm>. (Accessed August 27, 2007).
- 99 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. Group differences were examined using one-way analyses of variance. Findings were significant: $F(3, 141)=3.3$, $p=.021$, univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$.
- 100 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=17.6$, $p<.001$, $df=2$, Cramer's $V=.17$.
- 101 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=22.9$, $p<.001$, $df=4$, Cramer's $V=.20$.
- 102 Goodenow, C., Szalacha, L., & Westhimer, K. (2006). School support groups, other school factors, and the safety of sexual minority adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools*, 43(5), 573–589.
Harris Interactive & GLSEN (2005). *From teasing to torment: School climate in America, a survey of teachers and students*. New York: GLSEN.
Kosciw, J. G. & Diaz, E. M. (2006). *2005 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.
Russell, S. T., McGuire, J. K., Laub, C., & Manke, E. (2006). *LGBT student safety: Steps schools can take. California Safe Schools Coalition Research Briefs No. 3*. San Francisco: California Safe Schools Coalition.
Szalacha, L. A. (2003). Safer sexual diversity climates: Lessons learned from an evaluation of Massachusetts safe schools program for gay and lesbian students. *American Journal of Education*, 110(1), 58–88.
- 103 Differences were examined using independent samples t-tests and percentages are for illustrative purposes. The t-statistic was significant: $t=-4.6$, $df=147.3$, $p<.001$.
- 104 Harris Interactive, Inc. & GLSEN Study: 2005 Data File. New York; GLSEN. Chi-square nonparametric test was performed to compare the percentages of students in the current study who reported that their school had a GSA with the percentages of students from the national population. $\chi^2=13.2$, $df=1$, $p<.001$.
- 105 School level: $\chi^2=22.3$, $p<.001$, $df=6$, Cramer's $V=.14$; School type: $\chi^2=70.4$, $p<.001$, $df=6$, Cramer's $V=.25$.
- 106 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=26.9$, $p<.001$, $df=9$, Cramer's $V=.13$.
- 107 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=23.6$, $p<.001$, $df=9$, Cramer's $V=.14$.
- 108 Chi-square test was performed: $\chi^2=24.3$, $p<.001$, $df=4$, Cramer's $V=.15$.
- 109 Other LGBT Families: $\chi^2=14.3$, $p<.001$, $df=2$, Cramer's $V=.16$; LGBT school personnel: $\chi^2=28.1$, $p<.001$, $df=2$, Cramer's $V=.23$.
- 110 This question was worded: "Does the staff at your child's school receive any sort of training in how to support students with LGBT families?"
- 111 $\chi^2=18.8$, $p<.001$, $df=2$, Cramer's $V=.18$.
- 112 The figure represents a correlational relationship. Pearson correlation: $r=.21$, $p<.05$.
- 113 Pearson correlation: $r=-.19$, $p<.05$.
- 114 Analysis excluded those parents who did not know whether the school had had educator trainings. Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. To examine differences between those parents who reported training and those who did not on feeling acknowledged and perceptions of inclusivity, independent-sample t-tests were conducted. Group differences were significant for not feeling acknowledged ($t=6.4$, $df=132$, $p<.01$) and for both inclusive regarding LGBT families ($t=-7.4$, $df=175$, $p<.01$) and inclusive regarding other "nontraditional" families ($t=-3.8$, $df=174$, $p<.01$).

- 115 Independent-sample t-test was employed to examine group differences. For parental mistreatment, we used the mean of the five mistreatment variables as an overall indicator of mistreatment by teachers, by principal, by other school staff, by students and by other parents. The t-statistic was significant for both mistreatment ($t=-2.8$, $df=175$, $p<.01$) and child reports of harassment in general ($t=-2.2$, $df=174$, $p<.05$) and child reports of harassment LGBT-related ($t=-3.2$, $df=175$, $p<.01$).
- 116 Analysis excluded those parents who did not know whether the school had had educator trainings. Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. To examine differences between those parents who reported training and those who did not on effectiveness of addressing harassment and receptiveness of school staff, independent-sample t-tests were conducted. Group differences were significant only for effectiveness of addressing harassment: $t=-2.74$, $df=82$, $p<.01$.
- 117 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. To examine mean differences by type of policy (no policy, generic policy and comprehensive policy) on the acknowledgement and inclusivity variables, one-way analyses of variance were conducted. Group differences were significant for acknowledgement [$F(2,570)=7.7$, $p<.001$] and for both inclusive regarding LGBT families [$F(2,564)=27.4$, $p<.001$] and inclusive regarding other "nontraditional" families [$F(2,570)=9.9$, $p<.001$]. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$.
- 118 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. For parental mistreatment, we used the mean of the five mistreatment variables as an overall indicator of mistreatment by teachers, by principal, by other school staff, by students and by other parents. Group differences regarding mistreatment were examined using one-way analyses of variance. Findings for overall mistreatment were significant: $F(2,575)=4.8$, $p<.01$, univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$.
- 119 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. Group differences were examined using one-way analyses of variance. There were significant mean differences on receptiveness to parents addressing harassment with staff: $F(2,253)=7.4$, $p<.001$. Given that the smaller sample size of parents who reported their child had been harassed and that the parent had addressed the issue with school personnel, univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$ rather than the more conservative $p<.01$ used in other full sample analyses.
- 120 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. Group differences were examined using one-way analyses of variance. There were significant mean differences on effectiveness of addressing harassment with staff: $F(2,253)=13.2$, $p<.001$. Given that the smaller sample size of parents who reported their child had been harassed and that the parent had addressed the issue with school personnel, univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$ rather than the more conservative $p<.01$ used in other full sample analyses.
- 121 To examine group differences on school policy on students' reports of harassment and mistreatment, a series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were performed. The multivariate effect for the five mistreatment dependent variables (mistreatment because of having LGBT parents from teacher, principal, other school staff, other parents, or peers) was marginally significant, Pillai's trace=.12, $F(10,290)=1.8$, $p<.10$. The univariate effect for mistreatment from teachers was significant ($p<.05$), and the univariate effects for mistreatment from principal and from peers were marginally significant ($p<.10$). The univariate effects for mistreatment by other school staff and from other parents were not statistically significant. Figure 52 shows percentages of high mistreatment by policy group only for illustrative purposes. In that no student reported high levels (sometimes or greater) of mistreatment by the school principal, the marginal effect for that variable is not shown.
- 122 States that include protection based on sexual orientation are: California, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. States that also include protection on the basis of gender identity are California, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota and New Jersey. For more information on state laws as well as a state-by-state analysis of school safety protections, see GLSEN's report, *State of the States 2004: A Policy Analysis of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Safer School Issues*. Available from the GLSEN website: www.glsen.org.
- 123 States that have generic legislation are: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, Illinois, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and West Virginia. Also see GLSEN's State of the States 2004 report.
- 124 Of the states with comprehensive legislation, Iowa and Maine passed their legislation after data collection for this survey was completed, and thus, they were not included in the Comprehensive group but in the No Legislation group for analytical purposes. Similarly, Arizona passed their generic legislation after data collection was completed and were also included in the No Legislation group.
- 125 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. To examine mean differences by type of state law (no law, generic law and comprehensive law), one-way analyses of variance were conducted. Group differences were significant for homophobic remarks [$F(2,152)=12.6$, $p<.01$], racist remarks [$F(2,151)=14.4$, $p<.01$] and remarks about having LGBT parents [$F(2,151)=10.2$, $p<.01$]. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.05$.
- 126 Percentages shown in Figure for illustrative purposes. To examine mean differences by type of state law (no law, generic law and comprehensive law) on the acknowledgement and inclusivity variables, one-way analyses of variance were conducted. Group differences were significant for acknowledgement [$F(2,572)=5.6$, $p<.01$] and for inclusive regarding LGBT families [$F(2,565)=7.4$, $p<.001$]. Univariate effects were considered at $p<.01$. For the acknowledgement variable, mean differences were significant only between the comprehensive law group and the no law group. For the inclusivity variable, mean differences were significant only between the comprehensive law group and the other two groups.



DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations

Before discussing the implications of the current study, it is important to note some of the limitations. We employed two methods for obtaining participants and each of the two methods had differing success rates for the parent and the student surveys. In contrast to our previous research on LGBT students, obtaining students with LGBT parents via the Internet was less successful in this study and more rigorous recruitment was needed via community groups for LGBT families, family events and summer camps. For parents, the Internet survey resulted in a greater number of respondents than did the paper surveys by way of community groups and family events. It may be that students with LGBT parents are less likely to be connected to community listservs and other email lists, the primary route for announcing our on-line survey. Many community groups for LGBT families were no longer active or only existed in “virtual” capacities (e.g., through email lists or listservs), and it may be that there are fewer physical community-based supports (e.g., groups with regular meetings or family activities). For LGBT parents, it may be that they are more likely to subscribe to e-mail lists and belong to LGBT parenting listservs. Furthermore, it may be that the flexibility of taking an on-line survey at one’s own convenience is more suitable for a parent’s busy schedule.

LGBT families who were represented in this study had some connection with the LGBT community, either through a national organization for LGBT parents and/or their children, and local community groups or services for this population. Thus, the results in this report may not be representative of those families who may not be aware of such community supports or who cannot access them. For example, many of the parents and students who completed the survey were attending summer vacation events that attract families from all over the country. Yet some families may not have the time or financial resources to attend such events. Similarly, given that the student survey was only for those attending secondary school, it is difficult to know how certain common adolescent developmental characteristics, such as individuation from family, play a role in participation in the survey. For example, some adolescents with LGBT parents may not be interested in attending events for children of LGBT parents because they do not want to attend family-related functions, in general, or they may not feel the need to connect with other students based on a shared parental characteristic.

As mentioned in the Methods section, although the majority of students identified as heterosexual, the student sample may have had a higher representation of students identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual than might be expected from national percentages. Given that a large portion of the survey respondents learned about the survey via GLSEN’s website and given that GLSEN provides information and resources for LGBT-identified students, it is likely that the percentages of students in this study who identified as lesbian,

gay or bisexual is greater than would be expected in the general population of adolescents with LGBT parents. In fact, this hypothesis is borne out by the fact that more students who learned about the study via GLSEN's website identified as lesbian or gay than students who took the paper version of the survey. Furthermore, it is possible that LGBT students who happen to have LGBT parents may be more comfortable with their sexual orientation and gender identity and may be more connected to LGBT community organizations such as GLSEN or COLAGE (Children Of Lesbians And Gays Everywhere) through which they learned about the current study. It is also worth noting that the higher percentage of LGB-identified students in the sample may also be a reflection of the fact that LGBT adolescents in the foster care system may often be placed with and perhaps adopted by LGBT-identified adults¹²⁷ and that LGBT adolescents are in the foster care system in significant numbers.¹²⁸ Given the number of LGB-identified students in the sample, the overall view of school climate depicted in this report, related to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, could be somewhat skewed—LGB students were more likely than non-LGB students to report victimization in school based on their gender, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. Yet there were no differences by sexual orientation on students' reports of bias in school related to having LGBT parents. Further research is needed that examines the intersection of LGBT identity of students and LGBT family status as it relates to student school experiences.

Although examining demographic differences among families was not the main purpose of this study, a larger sample size would have allowed for more comparisons in educational experiences across different types of families (e.g., families with gay fathers versus lesbian mothers, adoptive versus non-adoptive families). Among the parent sample, for example, the most common type of family constellation was two lesbian parents with a child in elementary school. Furthermore, it is important to note that there were very few parents in the study who identified as transgender and because of this small representation, we were not able to discern whether transgender parents differed significantly in their interactions with their children's schools. Among the student sample, there were few students who identified as transgender and only a small number of students of color, which limited our ability to examine whether the school experiences for these students were different than other students in the study. More large scale research is needed to examine in greater detail how the family-school connection may vary by family composition.

It is important to note that the level of analysis for this study was not at the family-level and the parents and students who participated in the surveys were not necessarily from the same families. For this reason, we were not able to examine any relationship between student reports and parent reports. Future research is needed that can explore how parental involvement or intervention with the school

may affect the child's experience of school climate. Lastly, the data from our survey is largely cross-sectional, meaning that the data was collected at one point in time. Thus, with the possible exception of the policy analyses, we cannot determine causality. For example, we cannot make definitive statements regarding the effectiveness of having supportive school staff, although we can say that there was a positive relationship between the number of supportive staff and parental involvement in the school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this survey help to further the discussion of LGBT issues in K–12 education by highlighting the experiences of LGBT parents and their children. Furthermore, it highlights how schools must understand school climate and school safety not only for students but for other members of the school community, such as parents. Educational experts maintain that the family-school relationship is an important factor in academic success for the student. To the extent that certain parents are excluded or not welcome in school activities or are mistreated by school staff and other parents, they may feel that they have less access to school information or educational resources for their children or may not have the same rights to voice problems or concerns than other parents, which in turn, could have negative consequences for student academic performance. LGBT parents in this study were more likely to report having problems with students in the school or parents of other students than they were to report having problems with school personnel (the principal, teachers and other staff). It is important for school personnel to understand that harassment by students of anyone in the school community, whether it be a student or a parent of a student, should not be tolerated. Furthermore, school personnel must consider that their responsibility for maintaining a safe environment for all members of the school community extends beyond students, teachers and staff. Parents must be held accountable for their actions while on school premises and mistreatment by parents of students while at school is the responsibility of the school. Parent-teacher organizations must also address issues of school climate and educate parents about school safety and their responsibility for creating and maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all parents as well.

Many LGBT parents in the survey carefully considered certain characteristics of a school when deciding on their child's enrollment, perhaps in order to ensure a safer and better learning environment for their children. Although the majority of parents reported that their child attended public school, the percentage of parents whose children were enrolled in private school (both religious and non-religious) was higher than the national percentage. Furthermore, nearly half of all parents in the study reported that they made the decision to enroll their child in a particular school for reasons other

than it was their local school. Although the most common reason for school selection was the academic reputation of the school, another common reason was the diversity of the school population. In addition, nearly half of the parents also sought out information about the school regarding how the school would address LGBT issues and the majority of these parents said this information was very important in their decision-making. LGBT parents may choose diverse schools or assess the reputation of the school regarding LGBT issues as protective measures to ensure a more positive school experience for their child or a more positive family-school connection. Such protective measures may also be more important for parents with younger age children as elementary school parents in our study were more likely to base their school selection on these factors.

It is important to reiterate that not all LGBT parents may have the ability to select the school their child attends. Sending one's child to a non-public school may involve a financial commitment that many parents may not be able to afford. Some public school districts, particularly smaller districts, may not have multiple schools at each level from which parents could choose. Some districts may not allow parents to enroll their child in a school that is not their designated school. Furthermore, some parents may not feel comfortable speaking with their school about LGBT issues for a myriad of reasons prior to enrollment. For example, a parent may not be open about being LGBT or feel safe in their community as an LGBT person, or a parent may anticipate that the reaction will not be positive and to do so would negatively affect their child's school experience.

LGBT parents in the survey often reported being very involved in school activities and having frequent communication with school personnel about their child's education. In fact, these parents were more likely than parents nationally to volunteer in school activities, attend parent-teacher conferences and belong to the parent-teacher organization. As with decision-making about school enrollment, LGBT parents may be more involved in their child's school in order to have greater information about what their child is experiencing in school and to ensure that she or he is safe.

In our previous research with secondary students, both LGBT and non-LGBT, students often heard homophobic remarks and other kinds of biased language in school. The students in our current study were no exception and most reported hearing these types of remarks frequently in their schools. However, these students also appeared to experience certain unique forms of harassment. A substantial percentage of students heard negative remarks about having an LGBT parent—remarks that may or may not have been directed specifically at them and many students also reported being verbally harassed because of having LGBT parents. In addition, it was not uncommon for some students to have been harassed because of their sexual orientation or because their peers assumed they were gay or lesbian because of their parents. Although these incidents

were not experienced by the majority of students in the survey, they were the most commonly reported forms of harassment—higher than harassment based on religion, race/ethnicity or disability, for example. It is particularly disturbing that many students reported being mistreated because of having LGBT parents by other parents in the school. These findings again raise the concern that schools must hold all members of the school community—school personnel, students and parents alike—accountable for their actions when they add to a hostile environment for students.

As we have found in previous studies with LGBT students, most students with LGBT parents do not report harassment to school authorities and often think that school personnel will not effectively address the problem. In contrast to the experiences of LGBT students, most of the LGBT students with LGBT parents had told their parent or guardian when victimized in school and most also reported that the parent or guardian addressed the matter with the school. Furthermore, most parents in the study reported that they had addressed the harassment with the school. Thus, in contrast to other populations of students such as LGBT students who may not be “out” to family members, it appears that students with LGBT parents may have more supports in that they may feel they can talk to their parents about negative experiences in school, particularly if these experiences are related to their family or perhaps even to their own sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. When parents intervened, they most often felt that school personnel were very receptive and that the intervention was effective. Parents, however, may not be the best judge of the effectiveness of talking with school personnel on their child’s behalf and students were not asked in the study how effective they felt their parental intervention was. Future research is needed, particularly at the family-level, that examines the relationship between student’s experiences in school, parent’s knowledge of their child’s school experience and the effect that parental involvement and intervention has on the student’s academic experience.

The findings from the survey remind us that school climate is much more than a safety issue; it is also an issue of a student’s right to an education. Students in our survey who experienced frequent harassment because of having LGBT parents, or because of their own sexual orientation or gender expression reported skipping classes and missing more days of school than other students. Thus, steps that schools take to improve school climate are also an investment in better educational outcomes.

Results from this study also highlight the important role that institutional supports can play in making schools safer for these students. Students whose school had a comprehensive safe school policy were less likely to report mistreatment because of having LGBT parents. The results of the parent survey provide further evidence of the importance of institutional supports regarding LGBT issues in school. Parents who

reported that their child's school had a comprehensive policy were more likely to report that addressing their child's harassment was an effective intervention, relative to other parents. Parents themselves reported a lower frequency of mistreatment in school when the school had a comprehensive policy. Results also provide evidence regarding the importance of supportive staff in the school experiences of students with LGBT parents. As the number of supportive school staff increased, students' reported grade point averages increased, and their frequency of missing school because of feeling unsafe decreased. The results also provide evidence supporting school personnel trainings on LGBT issues. Those parents who reported their child's school had had such a training were less likely to report that their child had been bullied or harassed in school, both in general and specifically related to their family. In addition, parental reports of educator trainings were associated with a more positive response from school personnel when parents addressed their child's harassment.

As with school-level policies, state-level comprehensive safe school legislation was associated with better school climate for LGBT families. Students in states with comprehensive legislation were less likely to hear homophobic and racist remarks in their schools and LGBT parents in these states were more likely to feel included in the school community. Unfortunately, while some states have made progress in implementing such laws, the majority of our nation's students remained unprotected at the state level.

It is clear that there is an urgent need for action to create a safer school climate for all students. There are steps that all concerned stakeholders can take to remedy the situation. Results from this study illustrate the ways in which the presence of effective legislation or policy and in-school resources and supports can have positive effects on school climate, students' sense of safety, and, ultimately, on students' academic achievement and educational aspirations. Furthermore, these results show how such school resources also enhance the family-school relationship, which in turn could further benefit for student achievement. Therefore, we recommend educators and education leaders and policymakers:

- Advocate for comprehensive anti-bullying and anti-discrimination legislation at the state and federal level that specifically enumerate sexual orientation and gender identity/expression as protected categories alongside others such as race, faith and age;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive anti-bullying policies in individual schools and districts, with clear and effective systems for reporting and addressing incidents that students experience;
- Provide training for school staff to improve rates of intervention regarding bullying and harassment, and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students;

- Include multicultural diversity training into professional development that includes information about LGBT families;
- Support student clubs, such as GSAs, that address LGBT issues in education; and
- Increase student access to appropriate and accurate information regarding LGBT people, history and events.

Parent-teacher associations must also acknowledge the diversity of their school communities and take steps to ensure that no one experiences mistreatment—students and parents alike. Thus, we advocate that they:

- Endorse policies and practices about appropriate and acceptable conduct for parents at school, and
- Offer educational programs for parents in the school community that include information about LGBT families.

Taken together, such measures can move us towards a future in which every child learns to respect and accept all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression and a future in which parents and school personnel can work together to promote a positive learning environment for all children.

Notes

- 127 A report from the Evan B. Donaldson Institute has shown that agencies focusing on “special needs” children and youth were much more likely to accept applications from gays and lesbians than other agency types which is noteworthy in that many of the LGBTQ youth in foster care would be considered “special needs” children. Source: Brodzinsky, D.M. (2003) *Adoption by lesbians and gays: A national survey of adoption agency policies, practices, and attitudes*. New York: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/whowe/Gay%20and%20Lesbian%20Adoption1.html>.
- 128 Sullivan, C.; Sommer, S., & Moff, J. (2001). *Youth in the margins: A report on the unmet needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents in foster care*. New York: Lambda Legal. Accessed from: <http://www.lambdalegal.org/our-work/publications/page.jsp?itemID=32009148>.



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ISBN-13: 978-1-934092-02-6

ISBN-10: 1-934092-02-9

